



# Kurrajong Handcrafts



## Spin-a-Long #4: Playing With Hankies

Silk hankies are the type of thing I keep buying on impulse. I am a complete sucker for anything in a little bag with a little price, especially if it is dyed in pretty colours! Trouble is, I get home and discover that a) I don't know how to spin it, and b) I don't really have enough for anything useful if I did. This tutorial addresses the first question, now I've figured it out, and explores the second question by suggesting ways to stretch your supply as far as possible.

Silk, as you probably know, comes from cocoons spun by silk moths. When the cocoon is dropped in hot water the gum (silk moth spit I guess) dissolves and the silk is available in one incredibly long, thin thread. Silk top, or roving, which you may have used, is made from fibres which have been cut to a uniform length and then combed. Silk hankies and bells, however, are made by stretching each cocoon over a frame in layers. No cutting – which means long, long filaments of silk. You will notice this immediately, and for about a week afterwards as they continue to follow you around the house.

### *Preparing hankies to spin*

1. Look carefully at the edge of the square and you will be able to distinguish several layers. Peel one off, as thin as possible. A thicker layer is harder to prepare and will result in very sore fingers. Make it thin.
2. Poke a hole in the middle of the square, put both hands inside and pull outwards. Your silk square has suddenly turned into a doughnut. Keep pulling outwards as far as you can reach.
3. With the silk still in a large loop, begin to work around the edge, attenuating the fibres further to make a roving. Remember that even though the threads are breaking, most are still extremely long: keep your hands a long way apart while doing this.
4. Once the roving is the thickness you want it, break the circle at any point and pile the fibre neatly or wind it around a cardboard tube. You're ready to spin.



### *What shall I do with my Hanky Roving?*

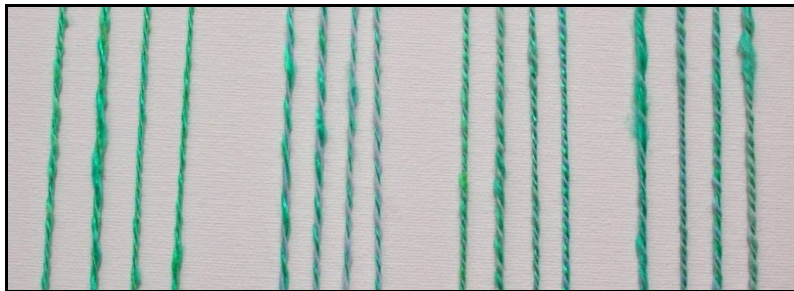
Glad you asked! It's likely you don't have very much. One or two hankies (many, many layers and a lot of work!) may produce 40-50 yards of pure silk yarn. Below are also a few other suggestions for reducing labour and making your silk go further. I had some matching hankies and merino/silk roving custom-dyed for my experiments, but anything that coordinates is fine.



Pure Silk: The silk hanky roving has quite a lot of character. It is possible to attenuate it further as you spin but more difficult than pre-preparation. You may come across slubby bits or noils, these can be picked out or left in to add texture. Pure silk likes loads of twist so take it slow.

Silk and Contrast Fibre: You can ply your silk single with just about anything – the high shine of the silk (higher than a prepared top will give you) will contrast beautifully and stand out in a knitted or woven fabric.

Silk and Coordinating Fibre: This is a much more subtle effect and is closer to the pure silk look but with only half the work. Good for making your silk go further as well. Try one ply of each or one of silk and two of the other for a subtly toned three-ply.



*From left: Pure Silk, Silk and dyed BFL, Silk and Merino/Silk blend, Silk slub yarn*

Silk Slub Yarn: This is my favourite. It uses very little of the hanky silk but in a very effective way.

1. Start by spinning two singles of coordinating fibre.
2. Prepare a couple of hanky layers and then snip them into 3 to 4 inch lengths. Place in a bowl near your forward plying hand.
3. Ply a couple of yards of yarn, then hold the twist with your back hand while you pick up a piece of silk with your forward hand. Pinch the twist with the forward hand and hold the end of the silk piece in between the two singles just where they separate.
4. Slide your back hand towards you, bringing the silk piece in line with the two singles and between them.
5. Roll the fingers of your forward hand to allow twist to travel down and secure the silk between the two singles. Continue to ply until you are ready to place the next slub.



No doubt you can think of more ways to use your hankies, I'd love to hear of them! Send your photos (no bigger than 50k please) to: dianemulholland [at] gmail [dot] com. Entries due August 6<sup>th</sup> to be included in the prize draw.