

Good Spinning Wheel Maintenance

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Your spinning wheel is a fine piece of furniture that will last for generations. It should be well cared for and should have a thorough evaluation, cleaning, and adjustment every six months. It is a good idea to recondition the wood as well.

Here is a list of the things you will need:

1. Fine grade spinning oil (30 grade) such as a 3 in 1 blend or sewing machine oil. Always use a fine grade quality oil, as it will not get "gummy".
2. Fine quality furniture oil, such as lemon oil.
3. Murphy's oil soap, soft sponge and bucket
4. Foam tipped cosmetic applicators and fuzzy pipe cleaners
5. Lots of soft absorbent, lint-free rags.
6. Newspapers or a drop cloth for the floor.
7. Block of beeswax or paraffin.
8. Leather conditioner, such as Neatsfoot oil.
9. Replacement parts for your wheel, such as drive band, hooks, tension springs, brake band material, etc.


Spread out some newspapers or a drop cloth. Put your wheel into the center. If the wheel is dusty, use a dry cloth and give the wheel and all over dusting. If there are areas that are gummy or has dirt or grime, you can mix the Murphy's Oil Soap as directed and use a soft sponge to clean it thoroughly. Be sure and wipe it completely dry with some of the soft lint free cloths.

Remove all your drive bands, and tensioning bands. Remove your flyer head and bobbin and disassemble them. Lay them out on the newspapers.

Start cleaning your wheel from the bottom, up. Turn it up so that you can get to the treadle hinges. Remove any excess fibers. Use your pipe cleaner and clean them thoroughly. After cleaning, oil the hinges and wipe off any excess.

Check the footman. Some footman are leather, so use a soft cloth lightly coated with Neatsfoot oil, and rub into the leather. Be sure and remove any excess with a clean dry cloth. This helps to strengthen the leather and keep it flexible. Dry leather is brittle and can crack and break.

Check the top of the footman where it connects to the axle crank. Use pipe cleaners to clean the bearings and joints. Oil well. The wheel axle is a common place for fibers to accumulate so be thorough in removing them. Lubricate your wheel axle. A good oil bottle with a long point is helpful here.

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If any of your tensioning devices are threaded wood screws, remove them and clean out any fiber accumulation. Use the beeswax on the threads before returning them. They should turn easily and smoothly.

Use the sponge tipped applicators and pipe cleaners to clean out all the bobbin supports, and the flyer bearings. Make sure any swivel joints are cleaned and that they move effortlessly. Oil and wipe up any excess.

Wash the bobbin shaft of your flyer to remove old oil and dirt. Rub until dry then oil. Use your pipe cleaners on each of your bobbins where they thread onto the flyer shaft. Check the bearings on either end of the bobbins for signs of wear and tear. If your bobbins do not spin freely on the flyer shaft, even after cleaning and oiling, you can ream the bobbin bearings lightly by using a ¼ inch round fine chain saw file or fine sandpaper wrapped around a pencil.


Check all the joints of your wheel and tighten them accordingly. If you allow any "loose" areas, it can possibly damage your wheel. It is easier on the joints of your wheel if you do not allow it to "walk" while you spin. Cut a square or non-stick carpet liner and put your wheel on that or use rubber feet on the ends of the legs. Sometimes we can cause our wheels "walk" by treading in a forward motion as opposed to treading in a downward motion.

Use your fine furniture polish (I like lemon oil) and give all the wood on your wheel a nice rubbing, till it SHINES like the top of the Chrysler Building!

Replace any sprung springs, old worn drive and tensioning bands, crooked hooks, or hooks that do not have smooth edges... etc. If your nylon drive band is too loose and you do not have another one, you can cut a short section out, but be sure and cut the original joined area out. The ends can be rejoined by melting with a gas flame. A match will work, but it will carbonize the join (turns black). Hold the ends together until they cool completely. *Remember to remove your stretchy bands when you are not using them.*

Now, put that wheel back together, taking care to align everything correctly. For a wheel that treadles effortlessly, three elements must rotate freely; the bobbin, the flyer and the wheel. Sit and spin to some good music! Keep a soft rag handy to wipe up and catch some of the new oil as it warms. If your wheel manufacturer provides a maintenance kit, keep one in your spinning bag!

***HINT from the Ashford list: for lighter tensioning when spinning superfine Merino—Use a 4 ply commercial knitting cotton with a no. 61 rubber band on either side of the bobbin for your brake band.*

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