

NATURAL FABRICS

Fabrics are divided into two groups: natural and synthetic. Synthetic are also called man-made fabrics. The natural fabrics come from plants or animals. Synthetics are made from the chemicals obtained from coal, water, sulfur, and natural gas. This activity is about 'natural' fibers and the fabrics made from them.

Four Natural Fibers

Wool – Wool usually comes from the hair fibers of sheep. Cashmere, mohair, camel's hair, alpaca, Shetland, and vicuna are other types of wool fabrics. Wool makes warm, absorbent, and wrinkle resistant fabrics. There are two types of wool fabrics; woolens and worsteds. Woolens are made from both short and long fibers. They are soft, wrinkle-resistant and do not hold a crease well. Worsteds are made from long wool fibers. They are smoother and more durable than woolens and take a sharp crease. They may become shiny with wear. Gabardine, flannel, and tweeds are popular wool fabrics. Many garments also are made from wool knits.

Cotton - Cotton comes from the cotton plant. The fabric is absorbent, strong, and comfortable to wear. The length of the cotton fiber determines the quality of the fabric. Long fibers make the cloth fine and smooth. Short fibers produce a coarser cloth. Batiste, broadcloth, poplin and denim are some examples of cotton fabrics.

Linen - Linen is made from fibers of the flax plant. Because it is absorbent and cool, it is popular for summer clothes. The characteristic thick and thin look of uneven yarns give it a distinctive beauty. Untreated linen fabric tends to wrinkle excessively. Today most linens have special finishes so that they do not wrinkle as easily. Dress Linen, cambric, and butchers line are three types of this fabric.

Silk - Silk comes from the cocoon of the cultivated silk worm. The fabric is lustrous, smooth, strong and drapes well. Weighted silk fabric contains metallic salts. It is not as expensive as unweighted silks but does not wear well. If the label says 'silk' 'pure silk' or 'all silk' the material does not contain metallic weighting. High quality silk fabrics are expensive as compared to other fabrics and usually must be dry cleaned.

Questions to Answer

1. Name the two main types of wool fabrics. _____
2. Which kind of silk fabric would probably be used in an expensive silk blouse? _____
3. Why does linen fabric wrinkle less now than in previous times? _____
4. Which kind of natural fabric is used to make cambric? _____
5. Which kind of natural fabric is used to make poplin? _____
6. Which fabric is the best for a winter coat? Why? _____
7. What makes one type of cotton fabric smoother than another? _____
8. Which kind of natural fabric drapes the best? _____
9. Name two natural fabrics that come from animals. _____
10. Name two natural fabrics that come from plants. _____

