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Texas Agricultural Extension Service

People Helping People

Texas Cotton— Comfortable Fashion



TEXAS COTTON— COMFORTABLE FASHION

Becky Saunders*

Fiber from the fluffy, white cotton boll teams with the fashion industry to produce fashion which is in demand worldwide. Fabrics made of this versatile fiber appeal to consumers for fashion as well as comfort. Cotton's popularity has increased; consumers are buying more cotton and cotton-blend products.

Characteristics

Cotton can be styled into an array of fabrics, from cool lightweight knits to warm corduroys and velveteens. By changing fabric weights, finishes and garment styles, cotton or cotton-blend ensembles are suitable for many occasions and activities. Most cotton fibers are styled into clothing and household items such as sheets, towels or upholstery fabric.

Whatever the temperature outside, cotton and cotton-blend fabrics that contain at least 50 percent cotton are comfortable to wear. A natural fiber, cotton absorbs moisture from the skin, then allows it to evaporate. Cotton keeps the body comfortable through a range of temperatures.

Cotton is static-free, can be soft or crisp to the touch and sheds balls or pills on the fabric's surface. Cotton fabric can be dyed in a wide range of colors and is available in many colorfast prints and patterns.

Flame-resistant cottons are used in uniforms for fire fighters, in nonpressurized space suits for astronauts and uniforms for other workers with specialized needs. Sleepwear, particularly for children, is available in flame-resistant cottons.

Cotton is blended with other fibers to combine the best qualities of each fiber. Cotton can be blended with other natural fibers such as linen, wool and silk or with fibers such as polyester and rayon. Fabric blends containing at least 50 percent cotton perform more like all-cotton fabrics.

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Care

Today's cottons are easy to care for. Read labels for specific performance features. Because of recent permanent press advances, cotton fabric can shed wrinkles and does not require ironing. Shrinkage has also been controlled. To maintain these qualities, carefully follow care instructions on laundry products and on clothing or household items. Permanent press washer and dryer cycles relax wrinkles. Do not overload the washer or the dryer. Remove clothes promptly from the washer to prevent dye transfer to other items. Also remove items from the dryer so they do not form wrinkles. A brief tumbling in a warm dryer may remove or reduce wrinkles.

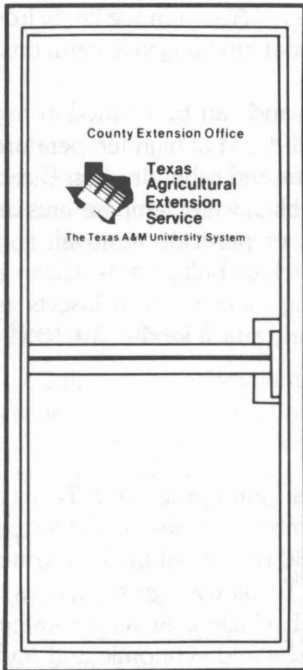
Cotton fibers are durable and strong and can be washed at high water temperatures, chlorine bleached and dried at high temperatures if safe for the fabric and garment style, dyes and other finishes. Bleach removes certain stains and whitens whites. High water temperatures can be used for washing heavily soiled items or pesticide removal. High dryer temperatures may be needed for thick or bulky items. Clean all clothing or household items before storing them because insects are attracted to soiled clothes and will particularly attack food stains, leaving holes. Cottons will mildew if stored damp.

Production

Cotton in its wild or natural state was found growing in Texas as early as 1530. Currently, Texas ranks number one among the sixteen cotton producing states; producing 20 to 30 percent of the U.S. cotton crop. Cotton is the leading cash crop in Texas with gross receipts to Texas producers totaling approximately \$1.5 billion. Adverse weather, sharp changes in supply and demand and world economic and trade situations continue to affect the price of cotton. Continued improvement in varieties and production technology has contributed to improved yields in recent years.

Because Texas has a variety of soil and climate conditions, cotton planting begins as early as February in the Rio Grande Valley and is not completed until June in the Rolling Plains region. Harvesting, beginning in late June in the Rio Grande Valley, advances northward as the season progresses, and harvest is not often completed until late winter on the High Plains. Cool night temperatures in late summer and fall can affect fiber qualities on the High Plains as well as long-staple pima cotton produced in the El Paso Valley.

All parts of the cotton plant are used. Cotton lint fibers are transported in bales to textile mills to produce fiber products. Cottonseed, meal and hulls are used for products such as margarine, cooking oil and animal feeds.



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