



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

People Helping People

CLOTHING TAGS & TIPS

Check Fabric and Workmanship

As you shop for apparel remember to:

Check the fabric —

- ✓ What is the fiber content?
- ✓ Can it be laundered by machine or by hand?
- ✓ Will it shrink out of fit?
- ✓ Will it fade?
- ✓ If it states, "Dry Clean Only", do you want to pay for that?
- ✓ Will it ravel easily?
- ✓ Is it durable—will it give good wear?
- ✓ Is the fabric suitable for the purpose you have in mind? Is it suitable to the style of the garment?
- ✓ Will it stretch out of shape easily?
- ✓ Does it have any special finishes such as permanent press or shrinkage control?

Check the workmanship —

- ✓ Is the garment cut on grain?
- ✓ Do patterned fabrics match at the seams?
- ✓ Are seams wide enough for altering, if needed?
- ✓ Are seams finished to prevent raveling?
- ✓ Is the stitching secure?
- ✓ Are the buttonholes well made?
- ✓ Are strain points reinforced?
- ✓ Can the hem be let out if needed? (Creases in permanent press fabrics cannot be removed.)

And, finally, is the garment right for you —

- ✓ Does the style look good on you?
- ✓ Is the color flattering to your hair and skin tones?
- ✓ Does it fit? Will it need alterations? Can you do it or will you have to pay to have it done? Major alterations are seldom practical.
- ✓ Is it comfortable—not too tight or too loose? Sit, stand, walk and bend to find out.
- ✓ Do collar, neckline and sleeves fit properly?
- ✓ Will it shrink out of size when washed or cleaned?
- ✓ Did you look in the mirror—front, side, and back?

Understanding Fabrics

Learning about fabrics and fiber families will help you make better buying decisions. In general, the natural fibers—cotton, linen, silk, wool—are usually absorbent, tend to soil but are easily cleaned. Synthetic fibers are usually strong, heat-sensitive and do not absorb moisture readily, so dry quickly.

Synthetic fibers are divided into generic classes; each performs differently. Fabric performance, appearance and durability are affected by fiber characteristics, length of fibers, yarn size and ply and the amount of yarn texturizing.

In addition, manufacturers often create fiber blends to enhance desired features and eliminate the undesirable. At least 15-20 percent of a fiber is necessary to add its properties (spandex is an exception). For example, when blending fibers, manufacturers will add:

- cotton, linen, ramie or rayon to increase softness and absorbency;
- wool or acrylics for added warmth, bulk or texture;
- ramie, rayon or acetate to cut costs;
- nylon or silk for strength;
- synthetics for improved washability, less shrinking or stretching;
- nylon or silk to add luster;
- synthetics for easy care and improved wrinkle-resistance.

For durability and shape retention, choose fabrics that are closely woven with good balance and strength of yarns in both lengthwise and crosswise directions. Heavy or uneven yarns in one direction combined with finer yarns in the other direction make an unbalanced weave, which is not as strong as a balanced weave. If texture and appearance are the goal, the differences in yarn combinations will help create such effects. Slub weaves, rib weaves and shantung are not as durable as broadcloth or gabardine, which are closely woven, balanced, with a high thread count. But, they may be chosen for their special effects.

Although it may ravel more easily, a loose weave also has advantages for hot weather comfort. A sheer cotton voile is made for summer wear although it does not have the durability of other cotton fabric constructions. Some synthetic fabrics need a porous or open weave for comfort.

Finishes play an important role in the satisfaction you receive from fabrics. Finishes are used to improve a fabric's appearance, performance, or both. Different finishes are available that will make a fabric shun spots and stains, flames, moths and wrinkles. Others control shrinkage or add easy-care features such as permanent press.

Whatever the fiber, fabric or finish, follow the manufacturer's instructions to keep the garment looking its best and wearing longer.

Judging Quality

Quality clothing combines the best of style, workmanship and serviceability. It means well cut, well chosen fabric and a just-right finished appearance. Learn to judge quality, then decide the level you want to pay for.

Fabric is the basic foundation of a garment. When examining clothing, check the grain and the color match of garment pieces.

If the garment is cut off-grain the skirt, bodice, collar or sleeves will hang crooked on the body. Little can be done about these major defects, and the garment may go on the sale rack. Beware.

Color match problems are easier to detect. Check carefully that all sections of the garment are exactly the same color. If some parts are cut from different dye lots or print lots, differences in fabric color are quite possible. Such garments are often sold as seconds with the manufacturer's label removed.

The process of matching plaids and stripes increases the cost of the garment because of the added labor in cutting and sewing. Bias sections are often used to cut costs without lowering garment quality.

Learn to recognize quality features.

Collars should set smoothly on the garment. Corners should be even and not roll upward. Underlinings or undercollars should not be visible, and supportive fabric should be used if needed.

Sleeves should seem to blend into the total garment. They need to be roomy enough for the upper arm. Long sleeves should cover wristbone when arm is bent. The curve of the armhole should be smooth and gradual, and fullness in the sleeve cap should be evenly distributed. The crosswise grain above the elbow should be parallel with the floor, and inner sleeve seams should not twist on the arm. The lengthwise grain should hang straight from the end of the shoulder to the elbow.

Waistlines or waistbands should be smooth, flat, and even in width. Sewn-in ribbon seam binding or a strip of firmly woven fabric may be added for shape retention.

Hems should be even, proportioned to the width and flare of the skirt, and inconspicuous from the right side.

Closures may have simple, lapped plackets; more expensive garments may feature bound plackets. Zippers should be inconspicuous unless they are intended to serve as a decorative effect. Eliminating zippers cuts labor costs. The spacing and finishing of button-holes are labor-intensive. Fused button-holes, a cost-cutting move, are found in many synthetic fabrics.

Check The Fit

Before you buy a garment, look at yourself from the front, back and sides in a full-length mirror and check these points:

- ✓ Do the collar and neckline fit comfortably without gapping? Is the neckline neither too low nor too high?
- ✓ Do the shoulder seams of set-in sleeves hit the tip of your shoulder bone?
- ✓ Do armholes have enough ease? Find out by raising, swinging and bending your arms.
- ✓ Do bodice darts aim at the fullest part of the bust?
- ✓ Does sleeve length hit your arm where it should? Do sleeves hang straight and smooth, without wrinkling or twisting?
- ✓ Does the waistline hit your natural waistline, front and back?
- ✓ Elasticized waistbands provide comfort and a greater size range, but limit versatility.
- ✓ In a slim skirt, do darts release at fullest part of your hips?
- ✓ Are side seams of skirt perpendicular to the floor?
- ✓ Does the hipline of a straight skirt fit smoothly with ease? It should not cup under the stomach or buttocks.
- ✓ Does a full skirt (especially bias cut) hang straight with an even hemline?
- ✓ Do pants or slacks have a smooth fit, with no diagonal wrinkles across the abdomen and seat?
- ✓ Do side seams and front pleats of pants hang perpendicular to the floor?
- ✓ Is the crotch of pants high enough to prevent a sagging seat, but low enough for comfort?
- ✓ Does the garment allow you to move freely? Walk, sit, bend, and reach to test comfort.
- ✓ Is the length becoming? Can it be shortened or lengthened, and keep its fashionable look?

On Sale—Why?

There is some reason for a markdown on sale items. Before you buy, consider whether the reason makes any difference to you.

- Is the style on the way out? Knowing fashion trends will help you decide whether or not to buy such bargains. If the style is one you can wear a great deal immediately, it may be an excellent buy.
- Is it shopworn, soiled, or damaged? The cost of dry cleaning brings the price up again. The clever

seamstress may be able to mend a damaged garment and get an excellent buy.

- Is the store going out of business? Sometimes quality items will be sold at a markdown to move them fast.
- Is it an irregular or second? Irregulars have imperfections of color, size, weave or knit which may not affect wearing quality. Seconds have flaws such as a mend, tear, or run which usually show and do affect wear.
- Is it a color or style that didn't sell? Some colors or styles are not becoming to the majority of people and are apt to be left at the end of the season. If the garment is becoming to you, it can be an excellent purchase.
- Is the price reduced because hard-to-sell sizes are left? The very small and the large sizes most often remain on the racks. You're fortunate if you wear one of the less-common sizes. Sample garments or shoes may be in this type of sale.
- Is the item poorly constructed? A portion of the garment may be incorrectly cut (off-grain) or seams may be ripping or raveling. The woman who sews may be able to correct minor faults.
- Is the sale due to overproduction? Companies sometimes produce more goods than they can sell within a season. This surplus may be reduced in price to avoid carrying it over to the next season.

Reading Sale Ads

Beware of misleading sale advertising. When looking for bargains, your best protection is to be a comparison shopper and to be familiar with current prices on brand-name merchandise. However, don't rely on so-called "list" prices. "List" price is the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Few retailers charge "list" price unless there is no competition.

Don't be misled by terms such as:

"Percentage off"—Off what? Original price? List price? Mark-up for sale price?

"Half price"—a legitimate term, if truthful. Just be sure you know half of what price.

"Made to sell for" or **"Priced elsewhere"**—When was the price higher? Is it of this value now? Where does it sell for the higher price?

"Famous labels you will recognize. We cannot print them" Why can't brand names be included in the advertisement?

"Savings up to one half" is not a complete statement. To be meaningful, the maximum former selling prices in the store should be listed. Also disregard such attractive terms as "reduced from" "comparative value," "formerly," or "originally." These attention-getters are followed by "now priced at" or "our price is."

Read the fine print—"as is," "irregular," or "slightly damaged." Check for flaws or damage, although some can be repaired and be good buys.

Watch out for the ad that says the item will never

again be sold so cheaply. That may or may not be true, but so what? If the purchase is not needed, the low cost is not a bargain. Foolish bargain hunters become so intrigued by the slashed price that they completely forget to judge the purchase in terms of their personal needs.

Understanding Sales

Knowing about different types of sales can help you find a good buy on sale merchandise.

Clearance sales move, or "clear away," garments that are left over from previous seasons or that are going out of style. Savings may range from 25 to 50 percent.

Special-purchase sales feature garments bought at a reduced price in the wholesale market. The quality may be acceptable, but usually garments are not the same quality as the store's regular merchandise. The garments may have irregularities that justify a markdown of 15 to 20 percent.

Regular stock or annual sales are probably the best source of good quality merchandise. Clothing items from regular stock are sold at reductions of 10 to 15 percent. After the sale, the stock goes back to regular price.

Anniversary sales or founder's day sales commemorate the founding of the store. Some regular stock is reduced in price., other items are specially purchased for the sale and will not be carried in regular stock.

Seasonal sales are repeated each year, such as the August back-to-school sales. Good buys can be made at these sales.

Stimulative sales are intended to boost sales during slow periods. These include Mother's Day, one-cent and two-for-the-price-of-one.

Stores have seasonal promotions that follow a fairly definite pattern. Look ahead and plan your shopping.

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January is the month for storewide clearance sales on resort wear, furs, towels and sheets, shoes, coats, dresses, men's suits, infant's wear.

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February offers Washington's Birthday and Valentine's Day sales on winter clothes and sportswear.

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March brings winter clothing sales.

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April means sales on Easter fashions, men's and boys' clothing, women's and children's coats.

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May features Mother's Day sales including lingerie and handbags, and Memorial Day sales.

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June brings Father's Day sales and sportswear, camp clothes and midyear clearance sales.

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July features July 4th clearances of summer clothes, shoes, lingerie, toiletries, hosiery.

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August usually has a variety of sales—summer clothing, furs, back-to-school clothes.

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September brings more back-to-school specials.

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October features Columbus Day specials (coats and suits), lingerie and fur sales, school clothes, fall sportswear.

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November means Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas sales.

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December ends the year with its winter clothing specials (end of month) and after-Christmas sales.

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Think First—Then Buy

Before you make a decision about sale clothing, ask yourself:

- Do I really need it? Does it fit into my wardrobe plan?
- Will I have to buy accessories to complete the outfit? Can I wear it with clothes I already have?
- Does the garment fit well, or can I alter it?
- What kind of care will be needed?
- How will I pay for it? If this purchase is unplanned, will it upset my clothing budget? Remember, buying on "time" may add extra interest charges.

Read and evaluate advertisements carefully. Learn to read between the lines and ask questions.

Beware of stores that have too many sales or that are frequently "Going out of business" Think carefully before you go to a store that uses "bait" ads to get you in for a "bargain" and then tries to steer you toward other merchandise.

Know what you want and need and don't take a substitute for what you intend to buy. Avoid impulse buying—an impulse is likely to be something you don't want or need.

Shop around to compare prices and get the most quality for the least cost. Get to know your local sales seasons and take advantage of the savings.

Don't fall for the line, "It's exactly the same thing" as another, higher-priced item. Examine workmanship closely.

Check tags and labels for fiber content, shrinkage control and care instructions. Consider the care needed. Does it have to be ironed? Handwashed? Dry cleaned? Dry cleaning adds extra expense.

Consider how extensive and expensive alterations will be. Can you make the changes yourself, or will you pay someone else to do it? Remember that permanent press garments can't be enlarged because creases can't be removed.

Do try on clothes before buying. Clothing sizing is not always standard and you can't be sure the same size in different brands will fit you.

Remember that a bargain is a bargain only if you need and really want it! Shop carefully and make the sales purchase wisely.

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