

## 8

# CLOTHING TAGS & TIPS

## 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 or rayon to increase softness and absorbency;
- wool or acrylics for added warmth, bulk or texture;
- 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



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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.

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