

Green Fabrics for the Home

Spring has arrived and brought with it the desire to redecorate the home. For those consumers who are interested in protecting the environment, there are a variety of good ecological fabrics from which to choose. When examining natural fibers, the familiar wool, cotton, silk and linen remain excellent environmental choices, as well as some 'green' alternatives also worth considering.

Tencel and ramie are plant fibers that are seen listed among the contents on fabric labels. Tencel may be seen in interior fabrics in the future. Tencel is made from sustainably harvested plantation tree and the solvents used to make the fabric are recycled. Tencel reportedly drapes like silk, but can be as tough as denim or as lush as velvet.

Ramie comes from a linen-like plant and, combined with wool. Ramie is normally blended with other fibers.

Hemp, used to make sailing cloth for centuries, is gaining tremendous popularity, and with good reason. It is an incredibly strong fiber - 20 times stronger than cotton - that can be made into everything from rope to shoes to drapery and fabrics. It is grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers and no chlorine bleaches are used in its production. Hemp cloth can be found in local fabric stores now.

Wool, which is naturally fire retardant and soil and stains resistant, is also incredibly durable. It can be woven into everything from sheers to its most commonly known interior use as upholstery fabric. Because of its weight and body, wool needs neither lining nor backing when being used for draperies or upholstery, thus significantly reducing the amount of materials needed to complete the job.

"Green" **cotton** includes organically grown cotton, as well as cotton that is undyed. Until recently, most of us were not aware that cotton naturally grows in different colors.

Coyuchi (which means brown cotton), produces many interior fabrics, from upholstery weight to sheers.

Imagine the luxury of **silk**. It deserves its reputation as one of the most beautiful fabrics imaginable. Working with silk can be tricky, however, as it is quite sensitive to fading and breakdown with sun exposure. Often, pure silk is most effectively used in rooms or locations that don't get excessive direct sunlight. Silk is also wonderful blended with other fibers, as it contributes its qualities of having a soft hand, strength and that lovely shiny or luminescent look.

Linen, made from the beautiful flax plant, is always an excellent choice for fabric. It is easily grown organically, and takes and holds dyes quite readily. Linen is strong but soft, amazingly durable, absorbs moisture and doesn't lint (hence its popularity for dishtowels). Another bonus: linen naturally grows in every shade of white nature endows.

There are also some exciting **velvet** fabrics being made from recycled P.E.T. containers. These fabrics are called *ecovelvets*.

For additional information on the care of fabrics for the home or to receive additional information on environmentally-friendly household products, please contact the Santa Rosa Extension Office at (850) 623-3868.

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