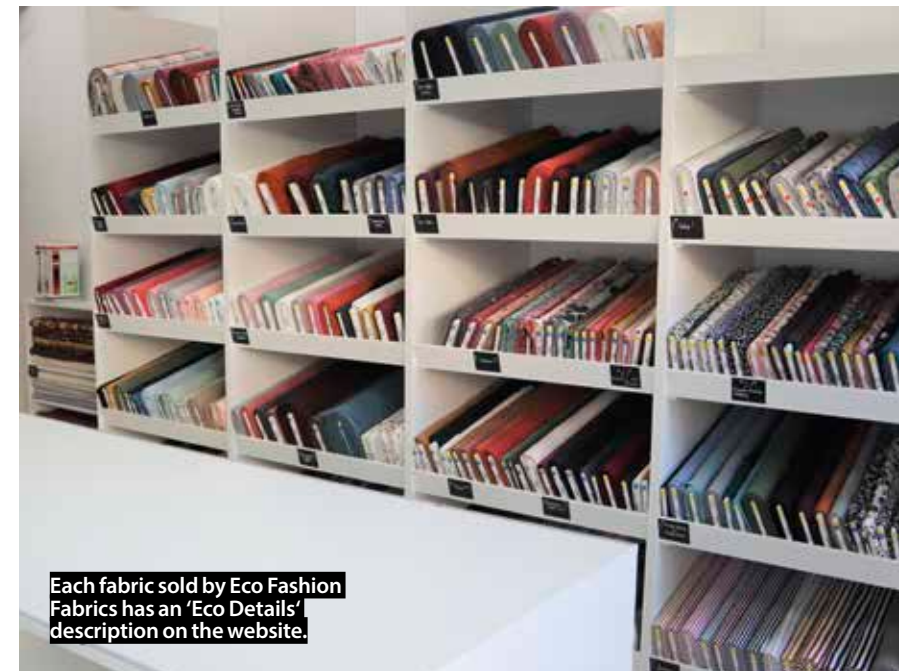


FABRICS OF THE FUTURE

Your guide to the damaging impact of fabric production and the latest sustainable materials on the market

Written by Rachel Avery



Each fabric sold by Eco Fashion Fabrics has an 'Eco Details' description on the website.

You may have heard of bamboo fabric or organic hemp but perhaps you're not quite sure how they measure up to your regular material bundles. Well, they are part of the sustainable fabric family which is rapidly growing.

It may surprise you that the production of fabric is a process that is particularly bad for the environment on many levels, which is why these new-age materials are a thing of the future...

HOW IS FABRIC MADE?

When you're in your local haberdashery browsing the rolls for your upcoming make, have you ever wondered how the material was made in the first place? The raw starting point of natural fabrics comes from a plant or animal – cotton from a cotton plant, for example. It's usually harvested by machine and then it also requires a lengthy industrial process to turn it into the fabric you will be familiar with. Spinning is the first step, then weaving, and finally processing which includes adding many chemicals like bleach to get rid of any marks or imperfections.

POLLUTION PROBLEM

The fashion and textile industry is shockingly the second most polluting industry after the oil industry, but how? Firstly, the water that's used in the cleaning process is filled with toxic chemicals, rendering it a waste product after it has been used. A Wateraid report in 2019 explains that "cotton has a water

footprint of 22,500 litres per kilogram." An astounding comparison as quoted by the United Nations in 2019 is that "it takes around 7,500 litres of water to make a single pair of jeans, equivalent to the amount of water the average person drinks over a period of seven years."

Then there's also the use of greenhouse gases in the production of the fabric as many of the factories in countries like China and India are powered by fossil fuels. The shipment of fabrics doesn't come without a stain either as ship and aeroplane fuels also largely contribute to the pollution issue.

With more and more materials being made, the issue is continuing to grow. How can we make a change? In a bid to be more sustainable, new fabrics have been

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developed out of a variety of different raw materials. There are a few elements to consider when it comes to judging the sustainability of fabrics, firstly where the raw material comes from, secondly

how it's made into fabric and thirdly how it breaks down once it is no longer in use. The aim is to create a closed loop system which means waste water being reduced where possible and the fabrics themselves being compostable and biodegradable so they get recycled rather than ending up in landfill.

THE GOLD STANDARD

The Global Organic Textile Standard has been set up to ensure there is a global criteria for the certification of fabric, and each material has to adhere to be accredited as

A FEW ECO FABRICS TO LOOK OUT FOR...

🌱 **Organic cotton** – Organic cotton is grown and made in a way that's kinder to the environment with no synthetic pesticides, and having no nasties on it means less water is needed during the cleansing process.

🌱 **Organic hemp** – The stalks of the cannabis sativa plant can be utilised for their fibres. Once it has been pressed it has a similar texture to cotton but it is much more durable, making it have a longer life.

🌱 **Organic bamboo** – The thing that's unique about the creation of bamboo fabric is the speed at which it can be produced because of how quickly natural bamboo grows. There are still strides to be made when it comes to the sustainability of the processing of bamboo but it has a lot of potential.

🌱 **TENCEL™** – TENCEL™ fibres are made from wood, and the process in which they are turned into fully functioning fabric is environmentally friendly.

🌱 **Piñatex** – Pineapples may be a great summer addition to snack on or add to your pina colada, but believe it or not they can also be turned into fabric. The leaves are often a waste product and they can be harvested for fabric production.

🌱 **Recycled fabrics** – Nylon, cotton and polyester are all key materials that can be recycled, making them in turn semi-sustainable fabrics.



Herbal Fab shares the sustainable journey of its fabrics online for customers to learn about.

SMALL STEPS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Not sure where to start? Here are some simple ways that you can be more eco-conscious when shopping

LOOK AT THE LABELS

The first step is just physically observing the labels on the fabric you are using to check exactly what it is and its credentials.

GET CLUED UP ON THE LINGO

The eco fabric world does have a lot of terminology to familiarise yourself with. When in doubt, Google!

REUSE AND RECYCLE

You may already have a whole load of items in your wardrobe or fabrics in your stash that aren't sustainable, but if you reuse and recycle them you're doing your

bit for the environment. Refashioning is a great way of prolonging the life of clothes.

SPREAD THE WORD

Now you're more clued up on eco fabrics, why not share the love and send the message far and wide? Upload that Instagram Story, start that blog or getting chatting in the haberdashery store!

BEWARE OF GREENWASHING

There are some brands who use eco-friendly sounding words to disguise their not-so-sustainable methods. Vegan leather being likely to be plastic, for example!



Therefore, they are champions of small businesses, as for them, "they are the strong pillars representing true positive change in the sustainable fashion industry."

ECO FASHION FABRICS

After watching a documentary on fast fashion, Linda Meuwissen wanted to take action. Firstly by changing the way she shopped for fabrics personally, then launching her own store, Eco Fashion Fabrics (ecofashionfabrics.com), because she recognised the challenge for consumers in "finding sustainable fabrics that ticked all of the boxes." She asserts: "Shopping for sustainable fabric is supposed to be a fun

experience and should be just as easy as shopping for fabrics in general!"

Fabrics like Lyocell and EcoVero are Linda's go-tos "for blouses, flowy trousers, tops, skirts and dresses" and she's

already noticed brands making the shift to these sustainable types of fabrics. "Sustainability is trendy, and sustainable fabrics are not dull anymore." While wholesale brands may be lagging behind, "the smaller brands we carry already made or are making the shift," explains Linda.

Although the company's focus is on eco fabrics, Linda is keen to point out that "there are many ways to be sustainable when sewing." She believes: "Sustainability can mean something different for everyone." She suggests you "use up your stash, reuse clothes/makes you never wear, upcycle garments you buy at the thrift shop, use

organic. It's the ultimate standard in organic textiles, applying ecological and social guidelines for production. Look out for the label in your clothes!

FUTURE FABRIC CHAMPIONS

Meet the businesses making a difference, making sustainable fabrics accessible to all...

HERBAL FAB

Brothers Prashant and Kunal Balar worked for their family's cotton-making business, but after a realisation of the damage being done, they switched to eco-friendly processes and founded Herbal Fab (herbalfab.com). Later joined by brother Aniket, the company is now a GOTS-certified stitching factory and supplier of a range of sustainable fabrics.

Their mission is clear: "There will be nothing left for the generations to come if we are not sustainable in what we do, and

a simple rule to be sustainable is to give back to nature what you take from it in the same form. If that is not possible then in a form that is still useful or at least not harmful."

The owners believe that "the year-on-year demand for sustainable fabric options has increased," acknowledging that "it is good to see that there is a growing awareness at consumer level too."

Setbacks for the brothers at the moment, however, include "the sky-rocketing increase in yarn prices" as well as "the dominance of the corporates [which] badly affects the authenticity of the supply chain and decreases the chances of true sustainability."

"THERE WILL BE NOTHING LEFT FOR GENERATIONS TO COME IF WE ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE."



Herbal Fab shares their organic cotton farmers on Instagram, take a look at #KnowYourFarmer.



zero-waste patterns, and of course buy better and more sustainable fabrics."

Linda's hopes for the future of fabrics? "Producing fewer but better quality fabrics is needed to become more sustainable. Hopefully, in five years the majority of the fabrics are manufactured in a more ethical and eco-friendly way so that the environment is spared and the workers are well paid and have a safe workspace."

ORGANIC TEXTILE COMPANY

Nancy Wheeler runs her textile company, Organic Textile Company (organiccotton.biz) from Wales, but her vision is much bigger than that. She seeks to "spread awareness for the use of organic and sustainable fabrics as an alternative to less environmentally friendly fabrics." The brand's bamboo 'silk' fabric is a hit with customers thanks to its versatility. "It's an amazing fabric for wedding dresses and evening gowns, eyemasks, ribbons and even drapes," explains Nancy.

Stressing why the need for change is so great, Nancy reveals that "switching to organic cotton can save over 90% in water use compared to regular cotton production." And for anyone concerned about the cost of going eco, Nancy assures us that costs are

being driven down, so you should be able to seek out sustainable fabrics at affordable prices. "There is sometimes a preconception that eco-friendly fabrics are very expensive. Although they may be slightly higher priced than regular fabrics, I have seen organic cotton and other sustainable fabrics becoming far more affordable."

The company works directly with local weavers in Kerala, and Nancy has a contact called Genesh who, with his team of weavers, crafts woven materials for international distribution. "We can work directly with Genesh to ensure fair prices and conditions for the weavers," reports Nancy. So not only are the materials eco-friendly, but the processes are ethical too. Keen to highlight the 'Who Made My Clothes' movement, Nancy credits it as "a way to unite everyone in the fashion industry, with the aim to work together and change the way clothing is sourced, produced and consumed."



Rachel writes about the magical world of weddings for *HELLO!* magazine. In her spare time, she shares lifestyle tips and reviews at rachel-recommends.com.



DEADSTOCK

What is deadstock, we hear you ask? Let us explain all...

Factories have major remnants leftover after production and this surplus fabric is then sold on as deadstock. As the damage to the environment has already occurred during the process, saving it from landfill is a big tick in the sustainability box.

Brands like **The New Craft House**, **Rainbow Fabrics** and **Amo Threads** sell deadstock material, or you can purchase handmade products that have been lovingly crafted from this leftover fabric.