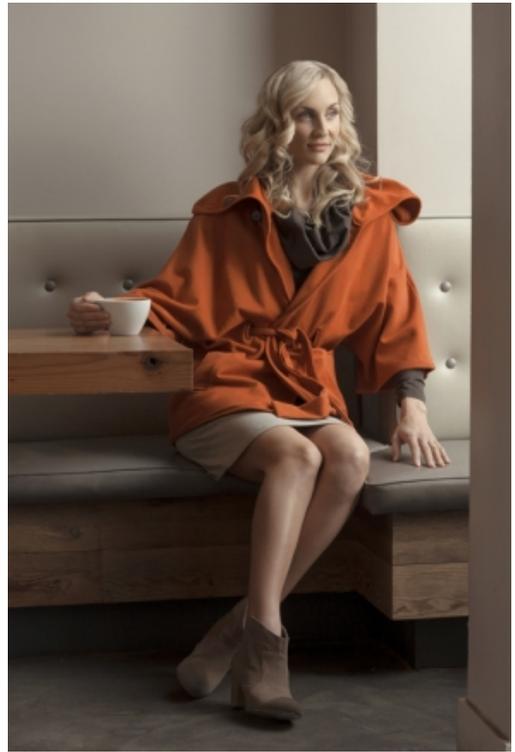


# Choose natural fabrics over synthetics

A man in San Francisco was recently arrested for stealing thousands of pairs of polyester underwear. When asked why he was doing this to people, he said that he was trying to save their butts. His attorney later commented that due to his client's good intentions, he was expecting a brief trial. [RD](#)

Julie Genser, [Planet Thrive](#) blogger, lives in a small Arizona community with others who have environmental intolerances. Their bodies can't handle the load of toxins in "normal" towns, buildings and even in their underwear. Cotton is one of the few fabrics tolerated by chemically sensitive individuals like Julie. Some people are so extremely sensitive that they need to boil the cotton and air it out for weeks to sanitize it before they can wear it. And some people are so sensitive they can't even wear cotton clothing if it's made with synthetic thread! [Allergista](#)

But why does this matter to you? If synthetic fabrics can have such a negative impact on some people, this may be a sign that natural fabrics are better for all of us. Your skin is porous. Have you ever had poison ivy or felt your hands burning after cutting hot chili pepper? If so, you understand that what touches your skin can affect you.



Many people are careful about the foods they eat and the cleaning products they use. But you can also minimize your potential exposure to toxins by paying more attention to the fabrics that touch your skin. Whether you're choosing clothes, bed linens, blankets or towels, look for items made from natural fabrics.

### **Cotton is the most popular fabric in the world.**

Cotton comes in a variety of forms: chintz, corduroy, denim, flannel, khaki, Pima. Because cotton is soft, comfortable, durable, and washable, it's used for just about every type of clothing.

If you live in a warm climate, you can build the majority of your wardrobe around cotton. When it's too hot or humid, avoid wearing denim or corduroy. The thicker fabric doesn't breathe as well and if you wash them and hang them to dry, they can take a day or two to dry.

### **[Laundry Study Shows Americans Have Few Hangups](#)**

If you're interested in adding more cotton to your wardrobe,

check out companies that specialize in eco-friendly organic cotton such as [Synergy](#), [Earth Creations](#), [Faerie's Dance](#), or [H&M](#) (Hennes & Mauritz AB), or check out [EcoSites.org](#) to find more.

## **Linen is synonymous with wrinkles.**

No matter how well you press linen (flax), it creases as soon as you wear it. But like cotton, it's cool and breathes well. If you don't mind the crinkling, it's a fabulous fabric for warmer climates. Although linen is great for casual activities, it's not necessarily a good choice for business. If you want a softer look, launder it yourself and skip the ironing and dry cleaning.

Check out this clip from [Renegade Health](#) on the benefits of organic clothing . . .

## **Hemp is a renewable resource.**

Hemp can grow in various climates and conditions around the world. In many cases, hemp and cotton can be grown without pesticides. This helps reduce toxins that end up in our water supplies, so it's healthier for everyone involved: the farmers, textile workers and customers.

If you'd like to learn more about the many benefits and uses of hemp, take a virtual visit of the [US Hemp Museum](#). According to this nonprofit, "hemp is, overall, the strongest, most durable long-lasting natural soft fiber on earth."

Look through the many beautiful styles available at [Gramicci](#), [Earth Creations](#), [Hempest](#) or [Rawganique](#).

## **Wool can keep you warm even when it's wet.**

Wool (Alpaca, Angora, cashmere, Mohair, rabbit) is relatively easy to spot-clean. It's good for activities in cool humid or wet areas because its natural antibacterial properties help it

resist moisture and mold. It also has superior strength and durability over other natural fabrics.



BE CAREFUL. HE'S 50% POLYESTER.

But wool has some

disadvantages. First, it requires extra care and attention. Some pieces have to be dry cleaned, and others have to be washed in cold water, or they can shrink drastically. Second, wool has a beastly odor when it's wet. If you wash and hang-dry a wool sweater indoors, it may smell for a day or two. Third, the texture of wool can be irritating to some. Wool tends to be bulkier than other fabrics, so it takes up more closet or suitcase space.

If you find wool irritating, avoid wearing it directly on your skin. Layer other clothes under your wool pieces, or try softer cashmere or angora wools instead. You may also find that lined suits or jackets that are wool blends may also be easier to tolerate than things made with 100% wool.

One good thing about wool is that it's a renewable product, and the animals aren't harmed in the process. But according to the [Organic Trade Association](#), insecticides are applied to sheep to control mites, lice, flies and other pests. In addition, antibiotics are used for growth promotion to

compensate for unhealthy overcrowded conditions, which contaminates nearby water.

### **Silk is smooth and soft without being slippery.**

Because it drapes well and helps keep warm air near the body, silk is often used for scarves, blouses, dresses, suits, lingerie and pajamas. It's comfortable, but not as durable as other natural fibers. If you get a spot on silk it can be tricky to clean, especially when you're traveling. Some pieces require dry cleaning. If you launder it yourself you may need to use a steamer to get the wrinkles out or carefully press it with a warm iron. Otherwise you may damage the fabric. Many silk items can be fairly high maintenance, and therefore, are not necessarily ideal everyday use or travel.

Silks (chiffons) are produced by insects such as mulberry silkworms and moth caterpillars. When it's harvested from cocoons, it kills the larvae, so some people who avoid it because "thousands of silkworms are killed just to make a small amount of material." [NGE](#)

If you love silk, consider buying from a company who takes these things into consideration, like [The Ethical Silk Company](#).

### **Leather can grow in comfort and beauty as it ages.**

When you first buy a leather product, it may be bulky, stiff or heavy, but it usually becomes more comfortable the more you wear it. If you have a favorite jacket, purse or boots you like to travel with, consider wearing them if you're going by plane. Otherwise, you'll need extra space in your luggage. Unless you're traveling by motorcycle, leave your bulky chaps, leather bags and pants at home.

Leathers and suedes can stain easily and be tough, if not impossible, to clean. It can also be difficult to layer with

other clothes (with the exception of belts) and, therefore, isn't nearly as versatile as other fabrics.

Lots of shoes are made with leather because it's a durable and warm material. If you're expecting to use them in rain or snow, it's best to waterproof them. Use a nontoxic product such as [Bee Natural](#) or [Obenauf's](#).

Leather is made from the skin of various animals: buckskin (usually deer, moose or elk), nubuck (cattle), suede (usually lamb, but sometimes goat, calf or deer) or lambskin. Because leathers are animal products, some vegans and animal-lovers avoid it.

Although leather is a "natural" fiber, the tanning process involves the use of many chemicals, some of which have a negative impact on workers and the environment. Every year, millions of cows, pigs, deer, lamb, and other animals are slaughtered for food. Their skin is be a byproduct of that industry. If you're concerned about the welfare of animals, or the impact of the tanning process on the environment, you may choose to minimize the amount of leather (and meat) you purchase.

**All-natural fabrics are the safest option for your health.** Natural fibers breathe and wick moisture better than synthetics. Even though they may be treated with pesticides and contain dyes and fixatives, they generally have fewer hazardous additives than synthetics.



If you want to be extra cautious, choose fabrics made from organic fibers which were grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers or toxic herbicides and pesticides. But keep in mind that even they go through chemical processing before they become fabric.

If you're interested in buying all-natural clothing like these, or others such as bamboo, check out [Gaiam](#) or [Sweetgrass](#).

As you begin to transition to more natural fibers, begin with the things that are closest to your skin most of the time. For most people, this begins with underwear, basic tops and bottoms and pajamas or sheets.

If you happen to work in the medical field, check out the uniforms by [Natural Fabrics](#). People who work in this industry are so lucky. Their work is called "practice" and they get to wear pajamas all day. Well, scrubs aren't pajamas, but they're just as comfortable.

