

Eco-Style

Ecologically-minded fashions are increasingly popular today. While low-maintenance garments like hemp t-shirts can be cleaned at home, upscale designer gowns and suits require special care. Buying eco-fashions is a great way to reduce your environmental impact, but cleaning them with the toxic chemicals used in traditional dry cleaning garments isn't.

Finding a dry cleaner that uses the GreenEarth method is a good way to ensure your eco-clothing will last longer than just a few seasons without doing any damage to the planet. GreenEarth is a safe, non-toxic, biodegradable solution that will keep your garments soft and add to their sustainability.

What Is Eco-Fashion?

The Sustainable Technology Education Project (STEP) defines eco-fashion as clothes "that take into account the environment, the health of consumers and the working conditions of people in the fashion industry." It's all about trying to reduce the environmental impact of clothing, at every step of the process.

Eco-fashion incorporates all-natural, organic, and recycled materials into clothing. There are currently no standardized regulations for what can and can't be labeled eco-friendly in the U.S., but the European Union is developing standards.

While organic and sustainable garments tend to cost more than conventionally produced items, some retailers are offering more lower-priced eco-friendly options. Wal-Mart is the world's largest purchaser of organic cotton, and Target recently introduced a line of 100% organic clothing. Being "green" can be easy and affordable.

What it's made from

Sustainable fabrics are the main component in making an eco-friendly garment. Organically grown versions of fabrics you already wear, like cotton and wool, are becoming easier to find. Other materials, like bamboo and hemp, are new to the fashion world and add trendsetting prestige to an outfit, along with the environmental advantages.

To learn which can be cleaned at home which require dry cleaning, see the eco-fabrics cleaning chart below. GreenEarth solution is an eco-friendly choice for dry cleaning eco-friendly garments that won't fade or wear fabrics, so clothes stay newer longer.

Bamboo

The bamboo plant does not need pesticides or fertilizers, requires very little water, and can grow up to several feet per day. Bamboo also "breathes" heavily—a bamboo grove releases 35% more oxygen than other trees. Bamboo fabric is more absorbent than cotton, quick-drying, and has naturally occurring anti-microbial properties that help stop odor.

Factories that manufacture bamboo fibers use a process similar to that of rayon—using the caustic chemicals sodium hydroxide and carbon disulfide. "Greener" methods of making bamboo clothing are being developed, but the chemical method still has a smaller environmental impact than conventionally grown cotton and petroleum-based nylon and polyester fabrics.

Organic cotton

Cotton farming in the United States uses only about 3% of the farmland, but 25% of the pesticides. To put it in perspective, it takes 1/3 of a pound of chemicals to produce one t-shirt. Organic cotton is cotton that has been grown without chemicals on land that has been chemical-free for at least three years.

It must be certified organic by a third party—in the U.S., the Department of Agriculture regulates this process. Cotton that is grown without chemicals, but on land that has not yet been chemical free for a full three years, is referred to as transitional cotton.

Organic cotton garments cost more than conventional ones—up to 50% more. Some manufacturers use blended fibers with 10-25% organic cotton to help keep the cost of the garments down while still supporting sustainability. Organically grown cotton feels, looks, and can be washed just like regular cotton.

Hemp

The hemp plant grows well without using pesticides or other agrochemicals. It is a hardy plant that can withstand harsh weather, and fertilizes its own soil by shedding leaves throughout the season. These natural qualities make hemp a sustainable choice for the production of many goods.

Hemp is illegal to grow in the U.S., so hemp fibers must be imported for use in the apparel industry. It is not illegal to use hemp in manufacturing—hemp oil is an ingredient in many cosmetics, and hemp paper and clothing are sold in the U.S.

Hemp fabric is moth-resistant, quick-drying and holds its shape well. Though difficult to bleach, it can be dyed a variety of dark and bright colors. It is breathable and durable, and becomes softer through washing and wearing.

Linen

“Linen” can be an ambiguous term—it often refers to bed sheets, towels, and tablecloths made from a variety of fabrics. Traditional linen is an all-natural fabric derived from flax. Being all-natural, however, does not necessarily make it a sustainable choice.

The process used to create linen fibers from flax often uses harsh chemicals. Look for certified organic linen—it is chemical-free from the plant to the end product. Organic linen is generally not treated with wrinkle-reducing chemicals, so have it dry cleaned with GreenEarth to keep it looking fresh and crisp without any environmental hazards.

Organic Wool

Certified organic wool must comply with organic standards for livestock (such as organic beef). These standards include providing organic feed for the sheep, not overcrowding the sheep on the land, and the prohibition of synthetic chemicals and hormones. Because of increased production costs, organic wool does cost more than conventional wool.

Organic wool feels, looks, and can be used exactly like conventional wool. Some conventional wool garments are labeled machine washable, but because organic wool is usually not treated with any shrink-reducing chemicals, it should be dry cleaned. GreenEarth, in addition to being an environmentally-friendly choice, prevents shrinkage.

Recycled Polyester

Polyester is a petroleum-based plastic made from polyethylene terephthalate, or PET—the same plastic as water and soda bottles. Recycled polyester can be made from old polyester clothes as well as other similar plastic products, and may be labeled as “eco-fleece.”

Patagonia, a brand of outdoor wear, pioneered a program where customers can send back their worn-out polyester items to be recycled and sold again. In addition to sportswear, more upscale items such as suits are being made from this material. To protect nicer items from the agitation of a washing machine, have them dry cleaned with GreenEarth so they last longer without the use of toxic chemicals.

While recycling is a hallmark of the environmental movement, the chemical process used to melt down and remake polyester is not always eco-friendly. Even so, purchasing recycled rather than new polyester items reduces the amount of oil needed to produce garments, and reduces the amount of polyester going into landfills.

How to Clean

Depending on the type of garment and the price you paid for it, you may not want to risk washing your eco-fashion items at home. Many items, no matter what they are made from, are labeled “dry clean only,” and there are good reasons for it. Dry cleaning extends the life of a garment by reducing the wear and tear from a regular washing machine. Unlike traditional dry cleaning, GreenEarth is eco-friendly and gentle on fabrics.

FABRIC WHEN TO WASH

WHEN TO DRY CLEAN

Bamboo

Cotton/bamboo blends that have been preshrunk, t-shirts, socks, and other casual low-maintenance items can be safely machine washed.

All bamboo bedding should be dry cleaned in GreenEarth, as well as blazers, sport coats, and dresses. Dry clean anything made from 100% bamboo - it may shrink in regular washing.

Organic Cotton

T-shirts, denim, and other everyday wear made from organic cotton can be safely machine washed.

Delicate knits, blends with other material (such as wool or cashmere), bedding, and nicer items such as blazers, polos and dresses, should be dry cleaned in GreenEarth.

Hemp

Casual shirts and pants can be safely machine washed. Hemp will naturally become softer over time, similar to denim.

Delicate knits, blends with other material (such as wool or cashmere), bedding, and nicer items such as blazers, polos and dresses, should be dry cleaned in GreenEarth.

Linen

If your linen has been pre-treated with wrinkle-reducing chemicals, it can be machine washed. Check the tag to find out.

If your linen has not been treated with wrinkle-reducing chemicals, it should be dry cleaned in GreenEarth to prevent wrinkles and reduce static and lint buildup.

Organic Wool

Only if the item is labeled machine washable, but be careful—organic wool may not be treated with shrink reducing chemicals, so even if it has been preshrunk, it may be distorted in the wash.

Almost all wool items need to be dry cleaned in GreenEarth, especially if your item has not been preshrunk or treated with shrink reducing chemicals.

Recycled Polyester

Fleece pullovers, jackets, and light but sturdy items can be machine washed.

Suits, dresses, and other dressy items should be dry cleaned in GreenEarth, and any polyester item that is filled with down (winter coats, sleeping bags).