

# Oregon Agricultural College Extension Service

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## LINEN

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The economic and social conditions of the flax-producing countries have been wrecked by the great war. Fields which once produced flax are now known as "No Man's Land." Men who produced flax and worked in the linen factories were sacrificed on the battlefields. Factories were destroyed or robbed of their machinery. Most of the linen manufactured during the past five years has been made for the governments, for war purposes. The law of supply and demand has affected the price. The scarcity of linen has resulted in the present prices being prohibitive for many people.

Purchasing linen today becomes a "family event." It is a time for serious consideration. The following suggestions will be helpful to the housewife. You are cautioned *not to depend upon one test*. Try them all, if in doubt as to the quality of the cloth.

## TESTS

1. Notice the number of threads used in the weaving of the cloth. Fine linens will have many more threads to the inch than coarse linen. Use a magnifying glass or linen glass to count the threads and to study their appearance.

2. Table-cloths or materials woven with a close firm weave wear better than those having loose weaves and long "floats." A float is a thread carried across a portion of a pattern on the wrong or right side. These loose threads wear out before the body of the cloth does.

Table-cloths with small close pattern iron more smoothly than others do. The pattern and the satin or twill background do not always shrink the same, thus the cloth may look rough.

3. Linen thread is more uneven and has more luster than cotton. Some cotton threads are spun to imitate linen. Hold the cloth up to the light; compare the differences in the thread.

4. Linen feels cool and leathery. Linen crushes and wrinkles easily. It will hold the wrinkles longer than will cotton.

5. Sized linen feels harsh and stiff. Unsized linen feels leathery, soft, and flexible. Test for sizing by flecking with the finger nail, vigorous rubbing, or boiling. Good linen does not require sizing.

6. Rub linen briskly. If the surface becomes rough and fuzzy it has cotton or tow in it. Good linen fiber is 12 to 20 inches long. Short

linen fibers are called tow; these are used for coarser, poorer qualities in linen manufacture.

7. Good linen does not give off lint. Break a thread of linen and of cotton. The former is tenacious and the broken end is erect and the fibers close together. The ends of the cotton thread are spread out in all directions. Tear a piece of linen and of cotton. Linen is harder to tear, and has an uneven torn edge. It gives a dull sound when tearing. The cotton tears easily, with shrill sound, and has a smooth edge. A little practice on this test may be necessary before one is sure of the results.

8. Moisture test, formerly relied upon, is of little value now, because cotton is made to respond to the linen test.

9. Oil test. Drop glycerine upon linen and cotton from which the sizing has been removed. Linen becomes transparent; cotton becomes opaque. Notice the difference upon holding these two tests up to the light.

10. Ink test. Place a drop of ink upon linen and cotton from which the sizing has been removed. Linen absorbs the ink readily while the ink remains upon the surface of the cotton a few seconds before it is absorbed.

11. Burning test. Linen fibers are longer and rougher than the cotton, therefore they burn more slowly. The ends of burning cotton spread out in every direction. The ends of the linen stand erect and compact.

12. Natural linen has a grey or tan color. Formerly linens were grass-bleached. This slow process of whitening the linen did not injure the fabric as our chemical bleaching does. Linen loses from 25 to 30 percent of its weight and strength when chemically bleached. The thrifty housewife will buy unbleached or half-bleached linen, thus getting additional wear from her linen. She can grass-bleach the linen until it becomes a snowy white.

13. Linen fibers do not dye readily. They fade quickly in washing and in the sun. Therefore, natural or white linen is more satisfactory for dresses than colored linen.

14. Linen launders easily, gives up stains readily, wrinkles easily, is heavy; is smooth and glossy when ironed well. Towels, table-cloths, sheets, dress fabrics, made of "union" cloth, have part linen and part cotton in them. Linen is valued for characteristics that cotton does not possess. Many folk prefer using all cotton for everyday needs, and have linen for occasional needs. Union cloth is much harder to care for and does not give as good service as all cotton or all linen.

#### IMITATIONS AND ADULTERATIONS

1. Finishes, such as sizing or high polishes are put on cotton, making it resemble linen.

2. Sizing is used to make the linen seem heavier and of better quality. Cotton thread is spun to resemble the linen thread.

3. Cotton is combined with linen, which is to be sold as "all linen."

4. Tow is substituted for good long linen fibers. This soon wears fuzzy and the cloth rubs rough.

5. Mercerized cotton is substituted for linen, and sold as linen.

6. Fringings on table linens, towels, or bed linens soon wear out. Machine hemstitching and scalloping do not wear as well as a damask hem.