

# Oregon Agricultural College Extension Service

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## CLOTHING CONSERVATION II

### COTTON AND LINEN MATERIALS\*

The length of service obtained from a piece of cotton or linen material involves the following:

#### I. BUYING.

In buying cotton or linen materials the following points should be noted.

##### A. Amount of Sizing.

Materials often have so much sizing that they appear to be of better quality than they are. If material still remains firm after rubbing between the hands, the sizing is not excessive. A sample may be boiled to remove sizing. Dry the sample and compare with respect to firmness and fineness of weave.

##### B. Firmness.

A firm cloth will not stretch. Threads should be close together and of uniform quality, and about the same number per inch in both directions. If threads can be moved easily with the finger nail the goods is not firm.

##### C. Weave.

Generally plain weaves cost less to manufacture and therefor should be cheaper than fancy weaves with threads of the same quality.

##### D. Possibilities of laundering.

Will the material demand a great deal of time and care in laundering in respect to:

1. Special starching processes?
2. Difficulty in ironing?
3. The removal of spots and stains?
4. Color?

##### E. Mercerization.

Mercerization increases the cost of cotton material but, since in this process the cotton fiber becomes stronger and therefor the cloth is more durable, it is worth the additional charge.

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## II. LAUNDERING.

After all precautions have been followed in buying material it will not give satisfaction unless it receives proper care. The care of cotton and linen fabrics centers chiefly around the laundry processes.

### A. Use of Alkalies and Bleaches.

The success of laundry work depends primarily upon the effect of water, acids, and alkalies upon the cotton and linen fibers. The fiber is injured and weakened by:

1. Using strong alkaline soap.
2. Using strong washing powders or liquids.
3. Using strong bleaching powders.
4. Hard rubbing.

An excessive amount of lint in the wash water is due to changes in the fiber which are brought about by washing or boiling with strong alkali soaps or powders. The action of the alkalies on the fiber also causes the material to become yellow in washing.

### B. Importance of Weave.

Another point which is important in successful laundering is the weave of the material, since the time and care involved in laundering are largely a matter of weave. Weave also enters into the service obtained from a garment, since one which launders easily and looks well afterward will receive much more wear than one which, because of its weave, has to be handled with great care.

1. Plain firm weaves
  - a. Become soiled more quickly.
  - b. Stand friction better.
  - c. Are easily cleaned, since dirt is more quickly removed from them with soap and water.
2. Plain loosely-woven weaves
  - a. Do not stand friction.
  - b. Need care in drying.
3. Twilled weaves
  - a. Do not become soiled as soon as plain weaves.
  - b. Seem to hold dirt longer than plain weaves.
4. Satin weaves
  - a. Do not stand friction as well as plain weaves.
5. Gauze weaves
  - a. Stand very little friction.
  - b. Have to be carefully pulled and stretched while drying.

Another point to remember in connection with loose weaves of all kinds is that they have greater absorptive powers, a fact to remember in bluing.

### C. Color.

Colored cotton fabrics so often fade that one dislikes to buy them, yet the use of white garments so greatly increases the laundering, that it is often desirable to use colored cottons. The colors of cotton fabrics

are obtained by printing, and by dyeing in the piece after weaving or in the yarn before weaving. Colors put on by machinery—flowers, lines, etc.—usually fade even when carefully laundered. Designs woven in the cloth by the use of colored threads, are more likely to be fast, since the entire fiber rather than its surface is penetrated by dye. Stripes and plaids may be either woven or printed—an inspection of the back of the goods will readily show which. Mercerized cotton whether printed or dyed, is less likely to fade than ordinary cotton.

In laundering all colored materials better results are obtained if the following rules are observed:

1. Set color by soaking for at least an hour in salt and water in the proportion of two tablespoons of salt to a quart of water.
2. Avoid high temperatures because they make colored goods streaked
  - a. Do not boil.
  - b. Use a moderate iron.
3. Do not use strong soaps, as the alkali in them dulls the color and often causes it to run.
4. Wash each garment separately and thus avoid any possibilities of dulling or changing shade by mixing colors.
5. Dry in the shade to avoid the fading action of direct sunlight.

#### D. Starching.

The last point in laundering is to make the material look as much like new as possible. In other words, the housekeeper wishes to add sizing to the material just as the manufacturer did. If the material is uncolored, she wishes it to be as white as possible. Most housekeepers use starch for all stiffening purposes. The starch keeps the clothing clean longer, and also acts as an absorbent for stains, and so saves wear on the fibers by avoiding excess friction in laundering. The manufacturer adds other substances besides starch to his finishing mixture, and the same practices have been adopted in homes. For instance, borax gives smoothness; paraffin, wax, lard, and turpentine, give gloss; and alum, a certain degree of pliability. The substance used to whiten is bluing, which counteracts the yellow tinge resulting from the change in fiber and some other surface causes for yellowing of clothes. To use either of these finishing processes successfully, the materials must be carefully worked into the fabric. This is done by dipping the garment in and out of the starch and bluing and rubbing well between the hands.

### III. OTHER WAYS OF PROLONGING WEAR.

Great emphasis has been placed on laundering, but real care of clothes also involves mending and removal of spots and stains.

#### A. Mending.

Save time and energy by remembering:

1. All garments should be darned and patched before laundering. Darning and patching are two general ways of mending cotton and linen garments. The object in both cases is to have the mends as inconspicuous as possible. To do this, use ravelings of the original material as thread

or, if this is impossible, use thread which matches in color, size, and luster. In darning, use either a plain weave or diagonal twill weave in order to imitate as nearly as possible the structure of the fabric. Since cotton and linen garments are laundered so frequently, the hemmed patch is better than the overhand patch, as it is stronger. For a successful patch the piece for patching should be cut larger than the hole to allow for hemming, and should match in material and pattern.

2. If the garment to be patched has faded, one may fade the patch by water and sunlight, or by use of oxalic-acid solution, or hydrogen-peroxide solution. (Keep oxalic acid out of reach of children. It is poison.)

3. Stockings wear longer if washed after each day's wear.

4. In darning stockings, if a loop is left at the end of each turn the hole will not be drawn up by shrinkage after washing.

#### **B. Removal of Spots and Stains.**

Spots and stains should be removed before laundering. Information concerning methods and materials to use in removing spots and stains can be secured from Farmer's Bulletin 861, "Removal of Stains from Clothing," or from Oregon Agricultural College Bulletin 218, "Methods of Cleaning."

#### **IV. MERCERIZED COTTON.**

By the treatment that cotton undergoes in the process of mercerization it becomes stronger and heavier, absorbs dye more rapidly and holds it better, and takes on a high luster almost like silk. It retains this luster after washing. The imitation mercerized cotton loses its luster if washed and rubbed in water.

#### **V. COTTON AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR LINEN.**

Cotton, both unmercerized and mercerized, has long been sold to the unwary as genuine linen, not only for use in making clothing, but also for trimmings, household linens, hangings, and upholstering. Now that there is a famine in linen, the substitution of cotton and mercerized cotton will become almost universal. The mercerized cotton is more desirable because its qualities more nearly resemble those which make linen especially satisfactory for table use, towels, and handkerchiefs. It is advisable to purchase mercerized cotton damask to help prolong life of the real linen now in the linen closet. It will be several years before a new supply of linen will appear on the market and in the meantime mercerized cotton damask, if chosen as wisely and laundered as carefully as linen, will look well and give good service.