

Qualities and care

A fabric's fiber composition plays a big role in how that fabric performs in a garment. The fiber contributes to the finished garment's comfort, longevity, and how it is laundered. Fibers come in three general categories: natural, manmade from natural components, and synthetic. The chart below explains the source, qualities, and care information for the most common garment-fabric fiber types, presented as a quick reference.

FIBER	ORIGIN	ABSORBENCY	PILLING	WRINKLES	BLEACH?	SHRINK	STATIC	STRENGTH/ DURABILITY	COMFORT FACTORS	CLEAN METHOD	IRON
Acetate	Manmade from cellulose	Fair	No	Fair	OK	No	Yes	Poor; weaker when wet	Retains crispness	Dry-clean; some are hand-washable in warm water	Low heat, 250 degrees
Acrylic	Synthetic	Poor	Yes	Resists wrinkles	OK	No	Yes	Fair; weaker when wet	Wicking qualities conduct moisture from body	Launder warm water/warm dryer	Medium heat, 300 degrees
Cotton	Cotton plant	High	No	Yes	OK	Yes	No	Good; stronger when wet	Has cooling effect	Launder hot water/hot dryer	High heat, with steam, 400 degrees
Hemp	Hemp plant	High	No	Yes, but less as it is washed; softens with wear	No; weakened by bleach	Yes	No	High; twice the strength of cotton, increases when wet	Cooling and insulating, depending on garment construction	Launder hot water/hot dryer	High heat, 450 degrees
Linen	Flax plant	High	No	Yes	OK	Yes	No	High; twice the strength of cotton, increases when wet	Very good cooling effect	Launder hot water/hot dryer	High heat, with steam, 450 degrees
Nylon	Synthetic	Fair to poor	Yes	Resists wrinkles	OK	No	Yes	High; loses some when wet	Water repellent; wind resistant, insulates well for its weight	Launder hot water/warm dryer	Low heat, 250 degrees
Polyester	Synthetic	Very poor	Yes	No, highly resistant	OK	No	Yes	High; no loss when wet	Nonallergenic; holds in body heat; retains crispness wet or dry	Launder hot water/warm dryer	Low heat, 250 degrees
Rayon <i>(including rayon from bamboo)</i>	Manmade from cellulose	Very good	No	Yes, wrinkles easily	OK	Yes	No	Fair to good; weaker when wet	Comfortable to wear in warm weather; has some antimicrobial properties	Launder warm water/warm dryer	High heat, 400 degrees
Silk	Protein produced by silk worms	Good	No	Shake out when hung	No, damages fibers	Yes	No	Good when dry; weakens when wet	Insulates well for its weight	Dry-clean or hand-wash warm/dry warm	Medium heat, 300 degrees
Wool	Protein from animal hair	Good	Fair	Some, resists wrinkles and they shake out	No, damages fibers	Yes	Yes	Fair; loses strength when wet; protect from moths and carpet beetles	Sheds water naturally; absorbs and dries slowly; insulating good for cold weather	Dry-clean or hand-wash warm/dry warm	Medium heat, with steam, 300 degrees