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Tencel Lyocell, the New Generic Fiber

by Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist

Lyocell is the newest generic fiber approved by the Federal Trade Commission. The trade name used for this fiber is Tencel. That is comparable to what we know by the generic name polyester having trade names such as Dacron, Kodel and Fortrel. All are polyesters. Tencel is made from natural cellulose found in trees. As trees are harvested, new trees are planted. The wood pulp from these trees is manufactured using a different process than is used in manufacturing Tencel's close cousin, rayon.

Tencel has many of the same desirable properties as rayon, including comfort, absorbency, excellent drape and abrasion resistance. It excels rayon in that it has these additional characteristics: high wet strength, resistance to shrinkage, easy care.

Tencel was created to accept color more readily. It can be dyed from the palest tints through medium tones to vibrant, deep darks. Garments made from Tencel are inherently soft and smooth to the touch. The fabric drapes well in soft, gentle folds. Depending on the finishes applied during manufacturing, Tencel fibers can feel like silk, cotton or wool, and still maintain a washable quality. Tencel also may be blended with synthetic and natural fibers. The fabric can be machine washed and tumble dried. Blue jeans made from Tencel and washed 1,000 times show little wear. As always when purchasing clothing or material, read the care label. Some garments may have a dry clean label because of the way they have been constructed and finished.

Garments made from Tencel include pants, skirts, suits and leotards. The fabric may be knitted or woven and range from crepes and twills to chambrays to poplins.

Tencel is more costly to produce than rayon, cotton and polyester. Garments will cost more in the retail stores. Fabric also may be purchased by the yard. If you plan to sew with Tencel, use the weight of the fabric as a guide when choosing the correct needle size and stitch length.

<i>Fabric Weight</i>	<i>Needle Size</i>	<i>Stitches Per Inch</i>
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Lightweight	9-11	12-15
Medium	10-12	12
Heavy	14-16	10-12

Prewash the fabric before cutting out the garment. If fabric ravel, use a seam finish that will not add bulk to the seam. Select an interfacing for the appropriate weight of the fabric. Press with a medium heat. Test press the fabric first on a sample.

File NF350 under: TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN

E-1c, Fibers

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