

# ORGANIC COTTON FABRIC RESOURCES

by FIONA DUTHIE

“ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IS A PRODUCTION system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a *good quality of life for all involved.*”

—The International Federation of Organic  
Agriculture Movement

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Highway by Ten14 Textiles,  
Original Vintage by Oliver  
Henry, Chain Link by  
Daisy Janie, Solid Yellow  
by O Ecotextiles, Bamboo  
Dot by Eden Fabrics, and  
Hydrangia by Cloud 9

Every year, more organic fabric choices become available to home sewers. We can now choose from American grown organic cottons and fair trade textiles grown, milled, and printed in countries around the world and we can buy designs or create our own organic textiles through online digital printing companies. More choice is always a good thing!

Organic cottons that are made in America are also becoming more and more available. U.S. growers of organic cotton are increasing plantings by about one quarter each year. It is now possible to buy organic cotton fabric that is processed within 100 miles of where it is grown. These American-grown textiles have a smaller carbon

footprint than imported textiles that travel farther, and are also guaranteed to not have been fumigated coming into the country.

Yet, the majority of cotton textiles are produced outside of the U.S. Most are grown in India, Syria and Turkey. Cotton is the largest crop under organic management in India. More farmers internationally are turning towards growing organic cotton due to the concerns about deteriorating soil conditions; farmers' health; the high costs of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers; and dissatisfaction with genetically modified (GM) cotton. Cultivating organic cotton allows farmers to operate successfully even with a lack of resources.

Digital fabric printing companies in the U.S. are starting to add organic textiles to their offerings. At the forefront of this movement is Spoonflower ([spoonflower.com](http://spoonflower.com)), offering Organic Cotton Sateen and Organic Cotton Interlock Knit, both

GOTS certified. This allows independent designers and anyone with a creative idea to print organic fabrics. Digital printing can be done with an economy of materials and resources, and eco-friendly, water-based pigment inks. These fabrics do come at a premium due to the print-on-demand system, but they also provide the opportunity to create and purchase small unique lengths of organic fabrics for individual projects.

As we sew, we can, at the same time, support American farmers and mills, fair trade growers and producers, as well as indie designers. Our choices can help create a quilt of organic textile production that continues to grow and blanket the earth. Think of how good it feels to relax into our home furnishings and dress our families confident that we have chosen a healthy, natural alternative for ourselves, our farmers and our earth.

## Selection Criteria

by Tara Boyd and Winnie Culp



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Monaco by Monaluna, Sunflower by Eden Fabrics, and Anemone by Oliveira Textiles

You will almost always do better choosing an organic fabric over a conventional version of the same material. While that's not at all in question, the organic label is often just the beginning of the story. The word organic doesn't necessarily guarantee that all your ethics and expectations for sustainability and good practices are being met. There are many things to consider when looking for a sustainable fabric, including:

**CERTIFICATION:** This is both obvious and important. For cotton, consider organic certification a crucial first step. Conventional cotton has the greatest negative impact on the environment of any fiber and legitimate organic certification requires a certain level of environmental commitment. With hemp, certification isn't necessarily as important as growing hemp doesn't generally require many chemical

pesticides and fertilizers. When looking at wool, organic certification is important but it is not necessarily enough — you may also want to ensure that the sheep are treated humanely and are not experiencing mulesing etc.

The base level of organic certification covers only the fibers themselves. It guarantees that the plants or animals were grown or fed organically but it doesn't make any claims about processing, dyeing, etc. Organic certification can be issued by many different organizations. GOTS, or Global Organic Textile Standard, is a certification that includes both social and environmental standards. Primarily used outside the U.S., GOTS certification really should be a baseline requirement for any organic fabrics from other countries.

**PROVENANCE:** Where is the fabric made? Where do the fibers come from?

Generally, fabrics made from fibers grown in the same country ("native fibers") have a lower carbon footprint than ones made with fibers that travel a long way to the manufacturing facility. Similarly, fabrics made in the country where they are sold and used are usually better for the environment than ones that are shipped around the world. This becomes very challenging when looking at fabrics made from silk and hemp, as silkworms are only farmed in certain areas and only certain countries legally allow industrial hemp to be grown and processed. It is very common for fabrics labeled "Made in the USA" to be milled from non-U.S. fibers. This is something to keep in mind if the carbon footprint of an item matters in your choices.

**COLORING:** It's probably obvious that non-dyed fabrics are better for the environment

## OLIVEIRA TEXTILES

"For us, sustainable product design means colors that are always in season, smart design, environmentally safe materials, simple care, beauty, performance, and sustainability. Our considerations around the life cycle impacts have led us away from traditional fiber categories, like conventionally grown cotton, and towards others, like hemp and organic cotton. I like designing continuous pattern so that it can be sold as fabric by the yard or cut up and used in our small accessory items like purses, belts handbags and hats. Creating Oliveira Textiles has allowed me to continue working in an industry that I'm passionate about – Textiles; while focusing on this century's most important challenge – the creation of a new model for a safer healthier future."

Dawn Oliveira, Oliveira Textiles

- Open for business since 2007
- Fabrics designed by: Dawn Oliveira
- Fabrics: 100% Hemp and 55/45 Hemp/Organic Cotton blend in twill and herringbone constructions between 10 oz and 12.5 oz.
- Produced in: China, Romania, and Turkey
- Printed in: Rhode Island, some in Europe
- Organic certification: GOTS certified organic
- Fair Trade certified

Oliveira Textiles  
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A sweet and simple quilt made using fabrics from Monaluna's Monaco collection

## MONALUNA

"My mother is a lifelong environmentalist, and I grew up with a strong commitment to the environment. However, it wasn't until I heard an NPR piece on the health impacts of pesticide use on cotton farmers in India that I really started to think about the negative side of the fabric hobbies that I love. When I realized that the availability of organic prints was still limited, I decided I wanted to bring new options and inspiration to the organic marketplace."

Jennifer Moore, Monaluna

- Open for business since 2008
- Fabrics are designed by Jennifer Moore.
- Fabrics: light-weight poplin weave, quilting weight cotton
- Produced in: India
- Printed in: India
- Organic certification: GOTS certified organic

Monaluna  
925-476-5068  
www.monaluna.com

## O ECOTEXTILES

"O Ecotextiles was conceived in 2004 when I decided to re-upholster my sofa. I found many fabrics that were sophisticated, but not environmentally friendly – or green (mostly recycled polyester), but not stylish. Even the "organic" fabrics were processed with chemicals that were harmful for people and the planet. Since I couldn't find a company that was creating sophisticated, stylish fabrics using organic or sustainable methods, I decided to create my own."

Leigh Anne Van Dusan, O Ecotextiles

- Open for business since 2007
- Fabrics are designed by a collaboration between the mills and O Ecotextiles.
- Fabrics: woven fabrics in natural fibers, in weights from 4.5 oz/sq.yd to 28 oz/sq. yd.
- Produced in: Japan, Romania, Chile, Great Britain, China.
- Printed in: Seattle, Washington
- Organic certification: OE100 and GOTS certified organic
- Fair Trade Certified

O ECOTEXTILES  
206 633 1177  
www.oecotextiles.com  
www.twosistersecotextiles.com



The perfect chair, stylish in any setting, upholstered in fabric from O Ecotextiles