

# GO ORGANIC

{ by Jennifer Moore, courtesy of Monaluna }



Photo by David Miguelucci

Although Earth Day is only one day a year, celebrate the principles year-round by choosing earth-friendly products and materials for your sewing projects. Discover why organic fabric is better for the environment, and then stitch a cute dress using organic fabrics for chic summer style.

“Organic” has become a buzz-word lately and every day organic fruits, vegetables and dairy are seen in supermarkets. But more often the word “organic” is popping up at local fabric stores, applied to a growing selection of cotton wovens and knits. What is organic cotton and how does it differ from conventional cotton? To understand the difference, and why organic options are so important, look at the entire fabric production process.

The word organic refers primarily to the methods used to grow and process cotton. Organic cotton is grown without toxic synthetic pesticides and herbicides and without synthetic, nitrogen-based fertilizers. Instead, farmers focus on using techniques that improve the soil health and maintain a balanced ecosystem, such as crop rotation, companion planting and the introduction of beneficial insects. Often, farmers use local plant varieties that are better adapted to the growing environment, and therefore produce a larger and healthier crop. The healthier plants naturally resist pests, resulting in stronger and finer cotton that’s free from residual toxins and chemicals.

By contrast, conventional cotton is one of the most chemically dependent crops. Manufacturing conventional cotton uses up to 25 different pesticides and fertilizers, several of which are considered toxic to humans, including some known carcinogens. In the U.S., it typically takes 1/3 of a pound of pesticide to grow enough cotton to produce one T-shirt. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of the chemical ends up on the crop and the majority of it is absorbed into the soil, groundwater and air.

The environmental impact of conventional cotton farming extends beyond the effects of pesticides and herbicides. The use of synthetic, nitrogen-based fertilizers dramatically increases the carbon footprint of a cotton crop. Excess nitrogen can escape into the atmosphere, streams and groundwater, contaminating the water supply and contributing to the proliferation of greenhouse gasses.

Organic farming practices are much better for the health of the farmers and mill workers. Most organic cotton produced today is grown in developing countries, particularly in India, where the training and resources to correctly use pesticides and herbicides are not always available. Chemicals are often used or stored incorrectly, resulting in devastating effects to the farmers’ health.

For cotton to be considered organic certified fabric, the processing procedure must meet strict criteria. The most common certification in the U.S. is the Global Organic Textile Standard certification, or GOTS. This certification ensures that not only is the cotton 100% organic, but the dyeing, printing and finishing also meet rigorous environmental standards. Additionally, the GOTS label also ensures that the product is a fair-trade product produced under safe, healthy and equitable conditions. GOTS-certified fabric uses only low-impact dyes, no chlorine bleaching, no formaldehyde, non-toxic and biodegradable sizing and finishing, and limits the amount of waste and discharge throughout the printing process.

Although there’s a very big difference in the way organic cotton is produced, the end product is very similar to conventional cotton. Because of the way organic cotton is grown and the lack of harsh chemicals used, it’s often stronger, more absorbent and shrinks less than conventionally grown cotton. However, organic cotton quality varies, and this isn’t always the case. Even though organic cotton doesn’t have pesticide or formaldehyde residue in the fabric, it’s still a good idea to wash it before using. Select a gentle cycle with cold water, tumble dry or line dry, and then press with a warm, dry iron. If the fabric is extremely wrinkled before washing, add a cup of white vinegar to the final rinse cycle.



## Organic Summer Dress

You'll feel great using fun organic print cotton to stitch a breezy summer sundress, and you'll look great, too!

### Supplies

- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$  yards of organic print cotton (A)
- 1 $\frac{1}{6}$  yard of contrasting organic print cotton (B)
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  yard of lightweight fusible interfacing
- All-purpose thread
- Removable fabric marker
- Tube turner (optional)

### Prepare

Download the [Go Organic pattern](http://sewnews.com/web_extras) at [sewnews.com/web\\_extras](http://sewnews.com/web_extras). Refer to the size chart below to select the desired size.

Size Chart			
Size	Bust	Waist	Hips
S	30" to 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	24" to 29"	32" to 39"
M	34" to 36"	30" to 33"	40" to 42"
L	36 $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 38"	34" to 36"	43" to 45"

From fabric A, cut one dress front and back on the fold.

From fabric B, cut two pockets, two straps, two ties and one front- and back-hem band, neckline band and neckline facing.

From the interfacing, cut one front- and back-hem band, one neckline band and two straps.

Transfer all markings to the fabric using a removable fabric marker.

Fuse each interfacing piece to the corresponding fabric piece wrong side, following the manufacturer's instructions.

### Construct

Use  $\frac{5}{8}$ " seam allowances unless otherwise noted.

With right sides together, pin the front-hem band upper edge to the dress-front lower edge (1). Stitch,



and then press open the seam. Repeat to stitch the back-hem band upper edge to the dress- back lower edge.

Select a basting stitch on the machine. Stitch  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the dress-front upper edge between the notches, leaving long thread tails at the stitching beginning and end. Stitch another basting stitch row  $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the upper edge between the notches, leaving long thread tails at the stitching beginning and end. Gently pull the bobbin tails to tightly gather the fabric (2).

Fold one pocket upper edge  $\frac{1}{4}$ " toward the wrong side; press. Fold the pocket upper edge along the



**Tip:** Favor the neckline band toward the dress wrong side for a clean edge.

foldline toward the right side; press. Stitch  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the pocket side edge without notches. Trim the seam allowance to  $\frac{1}{4}$ ", and then fold the edge toward the wrong side just beyond the stitching; press. Turn the pocket right side out. Fold the lower edge  $\frac{3}{8}$ " toward the wrong side; press (3). Topstitch  $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the pocket upper edge.

**With right sides facing up**, position the pocket on the dress front according to the notches and pocket placement marks; pin. Topstitch  $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the lower edge and folded side. Repeat to create and attach the remaining pocket.

**With right sides together**, fold each tie in half lengthwise; stitch  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the long edge and pointed end. Turn each tie right side out, using a tube turner if desired; press. Align each tie short-end center with each tie notch on the dress front; pin.

**With right sides together**, stitch the dress front and back side seams; press.

**With right sides together**, stitch the front and back neckline-band short ends to create a continuous piece. Trim the seam allowances to  $\frac{1}{4}$ "; press open the seams. Repeat to stitch the front and back neckline facing.

**With right sides together**, align the neckline-band upper edge with the dress upper edge, matching the seams and notches. Distribute the neckline gathers evenly, and then baste  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the upper edge between the dress-front notches. Stitch the neckline band upper edge, beginning from one side seam. Trim the seam allowance to  $\frac{1}{4}$ ", and then press toward the neckline band.

**With right sides together**, fold each strap in half lengthwise; stitch  $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the long edge. Trim the seam allowance, and then turn right side out; press.

**Align one strap short end** along the front neckline-band upper edge between the circle marks; pin. Align the opposite strap short end along the corresponding back neckline-band upper edge between the circle marks; pin (4). Repeat to pin the remaining strap to the opposite front and back neckline-band upper edge.

**Fold the neckline facing lower edge  $\frac{3}{8}$ "** toward the wrong side; press. **With right sides together**, pin the neckline facing and neckline-band upper edge, matching the side seams and sandwiching the straps between the layers (5). Stitch, and then trim the seam allowance. Press the seam allowance toward the neckline facing.

**With wrong sides together**, fold the neckline facing toward the neckline band along the seam to enclose the dress raw edge; pin. Topstitch  $\frac{1}{8}$ " above the neckline-band lower edge, catching the neckline facing edge within the stitching.

**Double-fold the dress lower edge  $\frac{3}{8}$ "** toward the wrong side; press. Topstitch  $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the first fold. ≈

#### SOURCE

Monaluna provided the Taali organic fabric (Hill and Dale and Chevron): (925) 476-5068, monaluna.com.

**+ Check out Jennifer Moore's "Go Organic" episode on Sew it All on PBS to watch her construct the featured dress. Visit [sewitalltv.com](http://sewitalltv.com) for more information.**