

Knotty Lady YARN S

Get to know Cotton!



With each day getting warmer and warmer, the direction we head in the yarn store changes from wool and alpaca yarns to cottons and linens. We here at Knotty Lady Yarns enjoy crafting all year long. But, we don't always want to work with a warmer yarn in the middle of summer. We are beginning a series in our newsletter to not only further educate ourselves, but our wonderful customers on the different types of fiber that are available to us. Let us begin with cotton!!

No better way to start than with a brief history lesson! The exact age of cotton is still unknown, but we do know that cotton was being used in Egypt and Pakistan around 3,000 BC. Around 800 AD, Arab merchants were trading and selling cotton goods. Christopher Columbus in 1492 found cotton growing in the Bahama Islands. It is safe to say that by 1500 cotton was known and desired worldwide. During the 1730 England industrial revolution, they started spinning cotton by machine. Eli Whitney, a Massachusetts native, secured the patent of the cotton gin in 1793. However, a machinist named Noah Homes may have built the cotton gin two years prior to the patent being filed. Working 10 times faster than by hand, the cotton gin helped increase the value of cotton in the US alone from \$150,000 to \$8 million over the course of 10 years.

Now that the history lesson is done, let's answer these two basic questions: What are the different types of cotton? and How do I finish/care for my project??

Types of Cotton:

Cotton

Pima Cotton

Egyptian Cotton

Cotton - Let's see what normal cotton goes through on an industrial level. After the cotton is harvested, it is made into large bales which are then blended and cleaned twice. After it is cleaned, it is carded (pulling the fibers into parallel alignment) and the individual fibers are combed and short fibers are discarded. The rows of cotton fibers are then joined to form the first stage yarn called sliver (pronounced "slyver"). The sliver is then dried and placed in a roving machine. From here, depending on the desired finished product, determines the final steps.

Pima Cotton - also known as Peruvian cotton, is a higher end cotton with longer fibers and is known for its softness, wrinkle-resistance, and durability. Normal cotton fibers are 1.1 inches long, where as pima cotton is 1.4 - 2 inches long. With a 50% longer life expectancy, it is also a great choice for anyone with sensitive skin. Pima cotton is typically grown in the Southwestern United States, Australia and Peru. A great example of pima cotton is Berroco Pima 100.



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Egyptian Cotton - defined not only by its location but also its quality. Egyptian cotton is hand picked, which puts less stress on the fibers. This allows for longer fiber lengths, which produces stronger, softer and stress resistant yarns. With a higher level of purity it is able to absorb more liquids. For our dyers out there this allows for brighter and deeper colors. This type of cotton is also more porous, allowing for more air flow. Between the climate of Egypt and the method of harvest this allows for "Extra Long Staple" or long fiber lengths which can reach up to 1.5 - 1.7 inches. Want to know what this type of yarn looks and feels like check out Blue Heron Yarns Egyptian Mercerized Cotton.

The major difference between Pima and Egyptian cotton boils down to climate and harvest. The actual cotton plant is the same *Gossypium Barbadosense* species. Pima cotton is harvested by a roller gin where as Egyptian cotton is harvested by hand. A roller gin is a machine, either hand crank or automatic, that separates the cotton from the plant and other impurities using rollers. Egyptian cotton has the added benefit of being grown in Egypt which is a hot and dry climate allowing the cotton to be stronger and softer which only improves with age and use.



Treatments of Cotton:

- Mercerized Cotton
- Organic Cotton

Mercerized - this is a process that increases the luster of your cotton. This process can also be done on other fibers such as hemp or linen. Originally devised by John Mercer in 1844 by treating cotton under tension in a sodium hydroxide solution followed by rinsing. This bathing process is done so that the hydroxide destroys the natural spiral formation of cotton. The result of mercerized cotton is more luster (silk-like shine), improves tear strength and reduces shrinkage. Additionally, mercerized cotton increases dye absorbency by as much as 25%. A stunning example of a 100% Mercerized Cotton is Tahki Stacey Charles Cotton Classic.

Organic - or organically grown cotton simply means the methods and materials that were used in all stages of the growing and harvesting process have little to no impact on the environment. This means pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and treatment chemicals are not allowed. The United States has strict federal regulations that must be followed in order for a company to label it organic. The Ecru and Aqua speckled yarn is Lana Grossa Organico Print is a good example of a dyed certified organic yarn.



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Blocking your Cotton Project:

There are many joys to working with cotton but that can quickly come to a standstill when blocking is the next step. When crafters talk about cotton one of the first qualities that come to mind is cotton does NOT like to stretch. Well, when it comes to blocking it can...and once cotton stretches it won't go back. Some sources say that you can wet block your final project. However, this is not our desired recommendation to you. Cotton will absorb a lot of moisture, especially if mercerized, this will cause your project to get heavy and stretch more than desired. Steam blocking allows for moisture control and prevents over stretching and stitch deformities. There are several methods to steam blocking, including some or all of the following materials: blocking mats, pins, towel and a steamer (can use house hold iron on the steam setting).

WARNING: Both Blocking methods involve either a hot steamer or iron so please use caution! Allow any surface or item to cool before touching or moving!

Method 1: Wet Blocking with a Hot Iron

This method works better on solid pieces not intricate pieces!

1. Warm your iron to the hottest setting
2. Cover your ironing board with a dry towel that is larger than your project
3. Take a wash cloth and get it very wet but not dripping (may need to re-wet depending on size of project)
4. Place your project on the ironing board laying it out how you want it blocked
5. Place wet wash cloth over the project, double checking that it is laying how you want your project blocked
6. Quickly press iron down on wet cloth. **DO NOT HOLD IRON ON PROJECT!**
7. Repeat if needed, move cloth to a different wet spot
8. Leave alone until completely dried

This process is great for small projects such as wash cloth, scarves, letters, individual granny squares, hat brim, etc. This process works well if you do several quick presses of the iron until you get the desired shape. Practice first on a small swatch to get comfortable with this method.

Method 2: Steam Blocking

This method works great on any project!

Pin project to blocking mats. Using pins that are rust proof and designed to withstand heat (normal colored plastic headed sewing pins will melt)

1. Warm Iron or handheld Steamer
2. Hold iron/steamer about 1 inch away from project or at the tops of your pins
3. Move iron/steamer over project until damp

DO NOT TOUCH STEAMER OR IRON TO PROJECT

Leave alone to dry completely before removing pins

This is a nice and easy process for any experience level crafter and will work on any blends of yarn. You can also steam your project to give it a nice shine for photos or showing off. Has your project has been hiding in the closet for a long time and has a musty smell? Use a steamer to freshen up any project with out the worry of washing it fully.