



FROM PLANTS TO PEOPLE

Learn how flax goes from a plant to the clothes
people have worn for thousands of years!





Introduction

Where do your clothes come from? How and where were they made? Who made them? These are questions that you probably don't think about when you get dressed in the morning. It wasn't too many years ago that many people made some of their clothes from fabric and patterns that they bought in the store. Today we are too busy to sew, the clothes are cheaper than they used to be, and we live in a time that it is popular to shop... a lot!

I. Get Yourself Thinking! Go to your closet or drawers and take a look at some of your own clothes. Where do they come from? Look at the tags on your clothing and fill out this chart.

WHERE DO YOUR CLOTHES COME FROM?

Clothing	Number	Where Was It Made? (3 examples each)
Shoes		
Shirts		
Pants		
Athletic Wear		

II. GROWING FLAX



The Plant

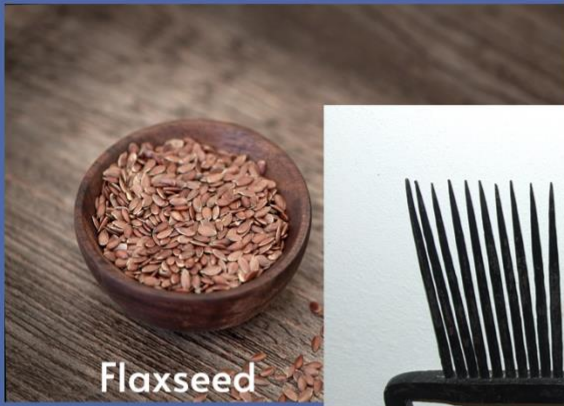
Flax grows in many places around the world. It grows in most of Europe and North America. Flax is a thin plant that grows to 3 feet tall. The stalk has a woody center core and a woody outer husk. Between these, long fibers (imagine hair) grow inside from the root to the flowers. These long fibers are what makes the cloth.

Drying Out The Flax

Seeds are planted in the spring and the plant grows quickly. When the plants have grown to full height, they are harvested by pulling the plant up from the root, so they don't waste any fiber. When they are pulled out of the ground they are tied in bundles and dried.



Remove The Seeds



Flaxseed



Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Korzuch.

When the bundles are dry, the seeds are removed with a comb (called a ripple) and is used as animal feed, to make linseed oil, or planted the next year.

Retting

Flax has a gummy, sticky substance like glue that holds the fibers together. This must be removed. This is done by retting or rotting, which is good name for it because when the plant has been retted it stinks really bad! Would you want that job? The flax is laid out in water until it rots so the farmer can get to the fibers. The stink is bacteria that breaks down the glue. The more stinky it is the better the retting process.

The bundles are removed from the water, untied, and laid out to dry. When the flax is thoroughly dry the hard labor begins.



Flax retting in a field, ready to be tied into a bundle.

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Stanzilla.



Photo courtesy of Barb Johns

Scrutching

The flax is placed on a bench and the outer hull is broken with a mallet or breaker. The next step to continue to get the straw away from the fibers is called scrutching.

Scrutching can be done with a long board with a slot at the top to hold the flax. A bat or paddle is used to beat the flax in a downward motion so the straw falls away. Sometimes they had a scrutching party where people in the community got together to do this hard work.



Photo courtesy of Barb Johns

Combing

The flax is ready to comb. This step removes any left-over straw and untangles the fibers. Here a person is using a heckshall, very sharp nails hammered through a board, to prepare the flax for spinning... finally. It is still not clothing yet!

The Flax Is Ready to Spin!
Go back to Old Swedes' website for a special video about making your own garden.

Now it's your turn!
Draw pictures in the boxes of the
process you read about.

**Growing and Preparing Flax
for Spinning**

