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Eco-clothes help you make a statement

By Tom Watson

Special to *The Seattle Times*

It's September already, and soon the short sleeves, light colors and sandals will go back in the closet for nine months. As you ponder your fall and winter clothing choices, remember this: Leaves will soon turn brown, but clothing is turning green.



SUSAN JOUFLAS / THE SEATTLE TIMES

"Green clothing," or "eco-clothing," includes clothes made from cotton grown without pesticides or those made from recycled, reused or sustainable materials.

Eco-clothes made from hemp, for example, have been around for years. Those were mostly fringe products, about as fashionable as a burlap bag. But now green clothing is emerging from the fashion closet.

You don't necessarily have to buy an organic cotton shirt to go green. Your wardrobe may be more environmentally friendly than you realize. For example, when you buy well-made clothes that will last several years, you save money and reduce waste.

When you pick up that cool vintage sweater at a consignment or thrift store, you make the ultimate eco-fashion statement. Buying used clothes is also easy on the wallet. Choices abound: The Puget Sound area has more than 120 thrift stores and well over 100 consignment shops, covering all types of clothing and price ranges.

In the new-clothing industry, organic cotton has quickly made an impact. More than 250 U.S. clothing brands now use organic cotton, up from 100 in 2002, according to the industry trade journal *Apparel*.

Why would you care about organic clothes? Because reducing the use of pesticides helps preserve the quality of air and water.

Resources

Sustainable Style Foundation Online Source Book:

www.sustainablestyle.org/osb/osbfashion.html

Organic Exchange:

www.organicexchange.org; click on Consumer Marketplace to look for sources of clothes by category

Cotton production uses 25 percent of the world's insecticides, according to the Pesticide Action Network. Organic cotton farming uses crop rotation and other nonchemical methods. Green apparel may also involve other environmentally preferable practices.

How do you know it's really green? When shopping for organic cotton products, look for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "USDA Organic" certification logo.

Among area stores, Patagonia in Belltown offers a large, diverse selection of green clothing. American Apparel in the University District has a section of organic cotton T-shirts (cream-colored only) tucked in a corner on the second floor.

Whole Foods stores in Bellevue and Seattle carry a few organic baby clothes, but their new stores being built in Seattle and Redmond plan to stock more eco-clothing. A few independent shops also carry eco-apparel.

You'll generally pay more for green clothing, but as the selection expands, prices are likely to come down. At Patagonia, women's organic cotton short-sleeved shirts started at \$38, and a women's fleece-style jacket made from recycled plastic pop bottles was \$76. But lower-priced items are out there. An organic cotton T-shirt at American Apparel are \$15.

Northwest companies lead the way in the development of the organic clothing market. Seattle-based retailer Nordstrom has set a goal that, by the end of 2007, 5 percent of the cotton used in the store's house brands will be organic cotton, spokeswoman Deniz Anders said.

Oregon-based Nike used 3 million pounds of organic cotton in 2003, more than any company in the world, according to Organic Exchange, a nonprofit trade group for organic agriculture. Nike blends organic cotton throughout its product lines. And the nonprofit Seattle-based Sustainable Style Foundation has made a national splash promoting green clothing and lifestyles.

With all the shades of green clothing available — from organic to used to durable — it's easier than ever to decide if it makes a good fit for you.

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Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at www.KCecoconsumer.com

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