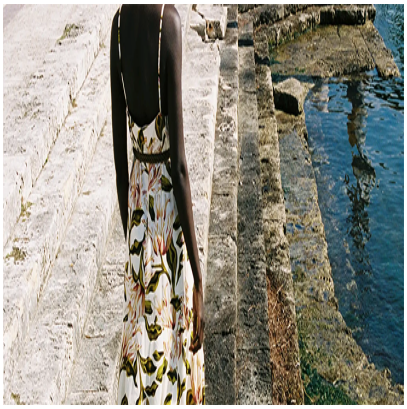


Brave New Material World: Why Viscose is bad for the planet and people and why Tencel is label to look for

Description

Getting dressed in the morning, buying clothes in store or textiles for the home, the questions on our minds, as consumers and makers, are usually along the lines of: does it fit me? Do I like the style and colour? Is it easy to wash?

As the world is waking up to the hidden cost of fabric production, perhaps what we could also consider is, how did the fibres in this fabric come into existence? And at what cost to the environment and to the people who made it?

As a consumer I would be horrified to learn that the clothes I wear or the bedlinen I buy was associated with killing endangered animals, causing health problems to textile workers or devastating ancient forests. No one wants to be associated with this practice, but what if the manufacturers are hiding this, or worse still if they themselves arenâ??t even aware? This is the hidden cost of unethically manufactured fabric. The ever-growing fast-fashion market puts demands on fabric suppliers to find cheaper and faster ways of producing, many with devastating consequences.



Photo via Wildfor.life/ / A United Nations initiative and campaign to combat illegal trade in wildlife

Viscose, also known as rayon is one such fabric. It is a semi-synthetic fibre made from trees, including eucalyptus, beech, pine, as well as plants such as bamboo, sugar cane and soy. Viscose is derived from wood pulp or cellulose, which is then dissolved into a chemical solution (sodium hydroxide and carbon disulphide) to produce a pulpy viscous substance that is spun into fibres.

Being plant-based, you would be forgiven for thinking it was â??betterâ?? than its synthetic equivalents. However the chemically-intensive, highly-polluting processes involved in its production have catastrophic impacts not only on the surrounding environment but also on the health of textile workers and local inhabitants living near to the viscose factories. Carbon disulphide,

for example, has been linked to coronary heart disease, cancer and birth defects in humans.



Orangutans also know as â??people of the forestâ??. Photo via Wildfor.life / A United Nations initiative and campaign to combat illegal trade in wildlife

An additional challenge of viscose production is its contribution to the irresponsible deforestation of the worldâ??s precious and ancient forests, which are being cleared for pulpwood plantations. More than 150 million trees are logged for the rayon supply chain every year, which has ruinous consequences on the environment including the endangering of vulnerable animals such as elephants and orangutans. When faced with this evidence, itâ??s clear that as consumers and makers, we need to check fabric labels and step away from viscose and rayon.

So if viscose is to be avoided, what is the solution?

The exciting news is to be found in the advancing innovation and diversification within the fibre and textile industries, with greater focus on transparency and traceability. Disruptive technology enterprises and brands are finding ways of producing recycled and alternative fibres from post-consumer clothing, straw and other low-low-impact fibres.

At this moment in time, TENCELâ?¢ Lyocell and Modal fibres are leading the charge as the better alternatives to viscose thanks to their versatility, quality and sustainable credentials from forest to fashion.



Stella McCartney Cherry Chambray Skirt / 63% cotton; 37% lyocell

These cellulosic fibres are manufactured using an environmentally responsible production process. Whatâ??s more, because they are composed of natural material, TENCELâ?¢ fibres are biodegradable and can fully revert back into nature. Perhaps one of the questions we could consider when buying new fabric is, could I compost this back into the earth without trace? Thatâ??s the dream scenario.

TENCELâ?¢ Lyocell fibres in particular have a notable reputation for their environmentally responsible closed loop production process, which efficiently transforms wood pulp into cellulosic fibres with low environmental impact. The solvent-spinning process recycles process water and reuses the solvent at an impressive recovery rate of more than 99%.

In my opinion, next-generation solutions such as these are vital for fashion houses and textile brands keen to alleviate their impact and damage on the natural world, while maintaining rigorous commitment to quality and luxury.



Leviâ??s Ex-Boyfriend Trucker Jacket / 79% Cotton, 21% TENCELâ?¢ Lyocell

It is a breath of fresh air to see pioneering fashion brands such as Stella McCartney, Leviâ??s, Reformation and Mara Hoffman investing in sustainable alternatives to environmentally challenging viscose, such as Tencelâ?¢.



Nyamuoch Girwath in Mara Hoffman 2019 Spring Ready to Wear Campaign. Frisia Floral Print Dress 100% TENCELÂ® Lyocell

The real power, however, lies in our hands, the hands of the consumers and makers who can buy or boycott according to the sustainable credentials of the fabric in question. Hereâ??s to investing in a brighter future for our planet.

For more information on the impact of viscose on the planet and biodiversity, check out the latest report by Canopy which works to conserve ancient and endangered forests.

Feature Image: Nyamuoch Girwath in Mara Hoffman 2019 Spring Ready to Wear Campaign. Frisia Floral Print Dress 100% TENCELÂ® Lyocell

CATEGORY

1. SUSTAINABILITY

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