Hand Woven Fabric Care

Depending on the type of soiling, choose the gentlest method that will be effective. Ideally, that will be cool water, mild soap, air drying and an iron temperature appropriate for the fiber. But, if, once in a while, you need warm water and a more robust detergent no harm done, (unless the item is wool or alpaca or cashmere when you must be very cautious of warm water, detergent and agitation!) Remember that even if you handwash, you can safely use the spin cycle on your washing machine to eliminate most of the rinse water.

When a fabric is hand dyed or painted or printed, extra care is recommended. Please be sure to wash these items separately. Consider using a "Color Catcher" or similar product. (They're reusable!)

Cellulose Fabrics

Rayon is a man-made natural fiber, usually from wood pulp. Tencel and Bambu are trademark names for rayon. Tencel is a more environmentally responsible method of making rayon and Bambu is made from bamboo (a grass, so it grows fast with a minimum of water and fertilizers.) All rayons behave a bit like their cousin, cardboard; when wet they are fragile and stiff, and they are flammable.

Cotton, like rayon, is a cellulose fiber. There are several fiber producing species of cotton, each with specific characteristics. All of them are labor, water and fertilizer intense crops. There are organic cottons grown, primarily in the southwestern states. Most of these are grown for very subtle natural colors, and it is difficult to source, especially in quantity.

Washing cellulose fabrics is easy; that's why we wear so much of them. They tolerate even hot water, harsh detergents and hot dryers. In return they ask for a hot steam iron

to eliminate the stiffness and apparent shrinkage. The gentler you are with cellulose fabrics, the longer they'll last.

Bast Fabrics

Bast fibers also originate from plants, but they are processed stem fibers. This group includes linen, hemp, ramie, banana, agave and many others. Bast fibers are durable, softening with use and washing. Hot water, hot dryer and a hot steam iron are fine, but they'll last longer if you're more gentle.

Protein Fabrics

Silk comes from the cocoons of certain moth caterpillars. The high sheen, widely available commercially, is mulberry silk, reeled from cocoons and degummed. If the caterpillar has emerged, or the cocoon is otherwise damaged, the silk that comes off is called "noil" silk. Noil silk typically has more texture and is less degummed and shiny. Tussah silk comes from a different species of moth's caterpillar and is known for its natural carmel colors and high sheen. Silk is tough for a protein fabric, but, go easy on the hot water and harsh detergent, and skip the dryer. A wool setting, with steam, on your iron is appropriate.

Wool, alpaca, mohair and cashmere (among many others) are hair or undercoats from mammals. These are susceptible to felting, which you want to avoid in a handwoven garment. The formula for felting is hot water, agitation and detergent, but any combination of those can be a problem. If you are handwashing (minimum agitation) you can safely use warm water. If you are using the "wool sweater" or "delicate" setting on your washing machine, use cold water. Avoid laundry detergent, choosing Woolite or your favorite shampoo (made for mammal hair!). Roll the garment up in a towel to squeeze out excess water and then hang or lay flat to dry. A wool setting, with steam, is good for any ironing.

Everything

Always wash new and newish hand wovens separately. This is to protect your other laundry from any residual lint.

If your garment is hand dyed or painted or hand printed, please be a little extra gentle washing. Consider using a “Color Catcher” or “Color Grabber” or similar product (they’re reuseable!) just in case there is fugitive color.

If you prefer to dry clean, please choose an environmentally responsible dry cleaner. The conventional dry cleaning chemicals are not healthy for you or the environment.

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