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MAGAZINE

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Fashion's Hottest Color: Green

True colors that don't poison the earth **BY DANNA WEISS**

LIME GREEN, fire engine red, and hot pink may be the spring colors you'll find in the pages of glossy magazines, but wearing naturally dyed organic duds has also become a trend, as more people choose to avoid synthetic dyes.

Many conventional dyes contain ingredients such as formaldehyde, heavy metals, and dioxin—that are not only a potential hazard to textile workers but that can also make their way into our water.

Choosing clothing made with eco-friendly dyes and colors may mean you don't quite follow the fashion herd. The color trail is long and usually begins with something called a "fashion forecaster"—someone who decides what colors the public will be attracted to. Forecasters sell their predictions to everyone from fashion

designers to car companies each season. That's why most designers come out with the same colors and trends at the same time.

There are alternatives. If you are purchasing clothing that's certified organic—whether it's cotton, bamboo, or hemp—the manufacturer

is probably using low-impact dyes. In many cases, it will be touted on their label or web site. So read the labels, ask questions, and don't put trendiness ahead of well-being. **O**

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If you are unclear on choosing fabric dyes, here is a tip sheet:

Natural dyes

have been used for centuries to color textiles, and are derived from plants, animals, minerals, and sometimes even insects. They can produce rich colors in a variety of shades. Colors may be somewhat less permanent than with other methods, and the dyeing process typically calls for the use of mordants—sometimes toxic minerals—to aid absorption.

Undyed natural color

means the fabric bears the original color of the fiber. The palette is limited (blues, greens, browns, and purples) compared to other fabrics. (And undyed doesn't necessarily mean the fabric is organic, so check the certification.)

Clay dyes

are made using natural minerals and iron compounds from the earth for color. They can retain their color better than natural dyes.

Low-impact fiber-reactive dyes

are synthetic dyes that chemically bond to the fiber molecules. They have diverse, vibrant tones, require less water for the dyeing process than conventional dyes, and use no heavy metals or known toxins.

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