

Linen is a plant (flax), a fiber, a yarn, a fabric for fashion and a fabric for home or industrial use.

The linen manufacturing process is complicated and requires great skill at each stage of production. There are many processes involved in turning flax to fabric which are summarized here as follows:

Cultivating Flax

Linen is a natural fabric produced from fibers of the flax plant. The plant is sown in April, produces delicate blue flowers in June and is harvested in August. After pulling, the crop is laid out in the fields to ret, a process where the woody bark of the plant is naturally rotted so that the fibers come loose from the main stem. The seeds are removed and used for linseed oil or cattle cake and the bark is removed by a process called scutching. It is used for chipboard. No part of the flax plant is wasted.

Treating Flax Fiber & Spinning Into Linen Yarn

The fibers are hackled (combed), to separate the long line and short tow fibers. The line fibers are generally drafted and doubled, and then lightly twisted before undergoing a wet spinning process. This produces strong, fine yarn. The short tow fibers are carded and drafted and then spun using a dry spinning method. Dry-spun yarns have a heavier count and are used for furnishing fabrics, heavy apparel and household textiles and knitwear. Ireland is the home of the most advanced wet and dry spinners in the world.

Weaving Linen Yarn into Linen Fabric

Weaving is an ancient craft which has been revolutionized by technology. The latest Computer Aided Design systems and dedicated sampling machinery ensure that new designs are turned around with utmost efficiency. High-speed, computer controlled looms are operated under the watchful eye of an experienced weaver giving the industry an ideal mix of automation and skill. Irish linen weavers produce a vast range of fabrics - all weights of apparel fabrics from fine cambrics to heavy suiting, damasks, furnishing fabrics and towels, both for the kitchen and the bathroom.

Finishing Linen to Create Texture or Purpose

Fabric finishing describes treatments which occur after weaving to make the fabric suit customer requirements. These include bleaching, dyeing, coating, bonding, printing, texturing and calendering to name a few. These treatments can change the nature, feel, performance, look and texture of a fabric. Finishing linen is a complicated process, and new techniques are continually being developed to give the final fabric new properties and handles. Different finishing treatments can produce the crisp elegance of a fine damask tablecloth or the cool comfort of linen sheets and meet the demands of the fashion industry for new textures and performance. Recent developments in finishing include softwash and aero finishes for a relaxed look and easy care finishes which cut down linen's creasability and allow the fabric to be fully washable and tumble-dry friendly.

OK, so now we know how it's made, let's find out what it's used for...

Fashion fabrics

- for making clothes

Furnishing fabrics
- for curtains and upholstery

Table linen

- napkins, tablecloths

Bed Linen
- sheets, duvet covers, pillowcases

Kitchen Linens

- tea towels, drying cloths

Handkerchiefs

Artist Canvas

Wallpaper

Postbags

Tent Canvas

Blinds

Aeroplane wing sealant

