

Test Your Cotton Pickin' Knowledge

Organic cotton options for your bedding, towels, and clothing are now widely available, but do you know exactly what you're buying?



- 1 **What is required to qualify for an "organic cotton" label?**
 - a. no pesticides used in fields for three years
 - b. fertilized without the use of chemicals or sewage sludge
 - c. approved by a third-party certifier
 - d. all of the above
- 2 **Of all the pesticides used in the United States, what percent is used on cotton crops?**
 - a. 5 percent
 - b. 15 percent
 - c. 25 percent
 - d. 35 percent
- 3 **True or False? No chemicals are used in processing organic cotton.**
- 4 **How much more than conventional does organic cotton really cost?**
 - a. 0–20 percent more
 - b. 21–50 percent more
 - c. 51–80 percent more
 - d. 81–100 percent more

ANSWERS

1. d. All of the above.

To grow cotton organically, farmers may not use synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, irradiation, sewage sludge, or genetic engineering for three years. Instead, they use beneficial insects that prey on harmful pests, improve soil health with organic compost, rotate crops to alleviate soil-borne pathogens, and pull weeds by machine or hand.

2. c. About 25 percent

of all pesticides used in the United States are applied to cotton. Globally, about 10 percent of all pesticides are used on cot-

ton. In California, five of the top nine pesticides used on cotton are carcinogenic, endangering farm workers' health and causing environmental degradation. SustainableCotton.org

3. False. Federal organic-fiber standards regulate the on-farm production of raw fiber, but there are no standards for the fiber after it leaves the farm. This means cotton can be treated with sizing agents, chlorine bleach, or heavy metal-containing dyes and still legally be "organic."

4. b. 21 to 50 percent. Raw cotton's cost per pound is only 25 cents more for organic than conventional, but the organic market is still small, so it lacks economies of scale (Pesticide Action Network North America, (PANNA.org). To support the organic cotton industry, buy organic clothing, towels, and bedding and ask retailers to stock organic cotton products.

—Vivienne Jannatpour

Stop Mold Before It Starts In steamy bathrooms, high relative humidity encourages bacteria, mildew, and mold. It's important, then, to keep humidity low. But how?

HEAT EVAPORATES HUMIDITY.

A small space heater, wall heater, or overhead heat lamp will dry dampness left over from your shower.

VENTILATION IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY

to control humidity in a bathroom. This can be accomplished by opening a window or turning on an exhaust fan while showering. Make sure your fan vents to the outside of your home—not to the attic.

CONTROLLING MOLD GROWTH

- Dry damp surfaces before mold can grow. After each shower, towel off the walls, floor, and other wet surfaces.
- Fabric tends to hold water and host mold (cotton is particularly prone). Don't install carpet in the bathroom. Wash bathmats frequently; damp bathmats left on the floor can grow mold. Make sure towels are laundered or hung to dry. Pull cotton shower curtains outside the tub to dry, and wash frequently.

—Debra Lynn Dadd