Flax is a filament fiber harvested from flax plants that when made into fabric, is called linen. Flax is the oldest fiber on record, first grown by the Egyptians having along the banks of the Nile (Kadolph, Langford, Hollen & Saddler, 1993). Other sources lay claim to the earliest usage of flax to be in the Stone Age (Cohen & Johnson, 2010). The term “linen” is often misused, being applied to fabrics that simply look like linen, or being used as a general term for sheets, towels, and tablecloths.

Flax is still widely used today, though it is less prevalent than it once was due to the ease of obtaining fabrics made of other fibers, such as cotton. Because flax is difficult to harvest it has become more costly to produce linen. Flax plants are used for many purposes, but the fiber itself comes from the stem and root of the flax plant, requiring careful harvesting, often done by hand. After the initial harvest, flax must be dried, soaked, crushed, combed and spun, creating a lengthy process that increases cost for consumers (Kadolph, Langford, Hollen & Saddler, 1993; Liddell & Samuels, 2012).
ADVANTAGES OF LINEN FABRIC:
- Excellent strength, gains strength when wet
- Hydrophilic: absorbs water and dries quickly
- Cool in warm weather
- Washable
- Withstands very high temperatures when washing and ironing
- No static, pilling, or lint problems
- Unique texture from the thick-and-thin pattern of the fibers

DISADVANTAGES OF LINEN FABRIC:
- Wrinkles very easily
- Fair abrasion, low durability
- Poor drape and elasticity
- Expensive

END USES OF LINEN FABRIC:
- Apparel: suits, skirts, jackets, dresses
- Interiors: tablecloths, napkins, wallpaper

REFERENCES:

Kate Black, USU Extension Intern
Lindsey Shirley, PhD, Clothing and Textiles Specialist
Sarah Hatch, USU Extension Intern
Jacqueline Hatch, USU Extension Intern
Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran’s status. USU’s policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic related practices and decision.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran’s status, refuse to hire; discharge; promote; demote; terminate; discriminate in compensation; or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person otherwise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.(FC/Clothing&Textiles/2012-24pr)