

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

Volume 5 – Issue 4 April 2013

From The Editor –

I sincerely hope each of you had a wonderful Easter – and that all the sewing was completed on time! Many of you are already busy with spring classes. Now is the time to be organizing summer classes. Most children, whether they admit it or not, are bored during the summer. Think about classes for the 'tween' group or even mother/daughter classes. Simple summer shirts, totes or elastic waisted skirts are good starter projects.

Weddings are always at the top of the list for spring and summer sewing projects. We have already had numerous calls inquiring about fabrics for, not only flower girls, but bridesmaids and even bridal gowns. Remember, Bear Threads has an incredible array of allover laces (33 inches wide), Chantilly and Alencon, and many other adult appropriate laces and fabrics. One quintessential summer favorite is linen. It is truly one of the most versatile and comfortable of all natural fibers. It has one major flaw and that is its' ability to wrinkle beyond belief!

I thought this would be a great time to begin a study of linen. Its' history is long and the process from plant to fabric very complicated. We will start from the flax plant which was first used for food, and follow the process to fabric. As we travel the linen road over the next few months, we will also learn about linen blends and why fabrics wrinkle.

Finally, we have all heard the line of "April Showers Bring May Flowers", but most do not know or do not remember the remainder of the poem, so I thought you might enjoy reading it.

Happy Stitching –

Sheila



"APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS"

April Showers bring May flowers,
That is what they say.
But if all the showers turned to flowers,
We'd have quite a colourful day!

There'd be bluebells and cockleshells,
Tulips red and green,
Daffodils and Chinese squill,
The brightest you've ever seen.

You'd see tiger lilies and water lilies,
Carnations pink and blue,
Forget-me-not and small sundrop
Glistening with the dew.

We'd have fireweed and milkweed
And many more different flowers.
Mexican star and shooting star,
Falling in the showers.

And if all the showers turned to flowers
On that rainy April day,
Would all the flowers turn to showers
In the sunny month of May?

Author unknown

LINEN AND LINEN BLENDED FABRICS

Part I – Plant to Yarn

To understand the blending of fibers, you must first know the attributes and characteristics of each of the components. This month we will begin with linen, and its' long history in the clothing and utility industry.



First of all you should know that flax is the plant from which the linen fibers are derived. For thousands of years flax has been a valuable cultivated crop for two purposes, the seed and the fiber. Food was a priority for early man, so it is likely that he was first attracted to the flax plant for the seed. The flax seed is not only edible, but is pressed to produce linseed oil. It is most interesting that weaving is believed to have preceded spinning. How, you might ask. Simple – After gathering the seed, the farmers probably recognized the toughness and flexibility of the flax stalks and collected them to be used for intertwining with stakes driven into the ground to make wind breaks, or perhaps, across streams to make fish traps. Thus, after continual exposure to the elements, alternately being wet and dry, the outer bark of the flax stalks would rot, revealing the shiny fibers and attracting man's attention.

The particular characteristics of flax fibers give linen its special quality. They are long, strong, lustrous, readily absorb water, and are good conductors of heat. Their drawback is lack of elasticity. For farmers, the adaptability of flax is an

asset as well. Growing in rich loamy soil, it can tolerate very different climates. It is grown from Holland to Northern France, China and the Baltics. Egypt, Sweden, Scotland and Northern Ireland once were all well known for flax. Today, by far, the largest output comes from Russia.

When flax is grown for the fiber, the seeds are planted close together so that the stems will grow straight, with as few branches as possible. This achieves the maximum fiber length. In their growing time of about three months, the plants achieve their mature height of 3-4 feet. The mature plants are harvested by pulling up the entire plant, not cutting at the ground level. This assures the longest fibers. Today, of course, this step is done by machine.

From this point (and without the risk of losing my readers with unnecessary details!) there are several processes to get the flax ready to be spun into linen yarn.

The flax fiber must be separated from the woody matter or bark, as well as the cellular tissue, both of which surround the fibers. This is done by decomposing the bark and tissue by one of two processes, one being *dew-retting* and the other *water retting*. Once the correct amount of decomposition has taken place, the flax is completely dried, and stored, ready for the next series of processes known as *flax dressing*.

In the next steps, the straw has to be *broken* and the flax, now bundled, must be *scutched* in order to remove the fibers. Lastly, the flax is *hackled* by passing the bundles of fibers through a series of combs to remove any small remaining pieces of straw, to remove the short fibers (*tow*), and to align the long fibers (*line*) parallel. Line, which is made into bundles, known as *stricks*, is used to produce the finest yarn. Tow makes a rougher, coarser yarn.

In Part II next month, we will follow the process from Yarn to Linen Cloth.

Sheila T. Nicol



"All In The Family"

Well, here they are - the terrific trio. Meet Mary Ann, Miss Lib, and Surfer, or as he prefers to be addressed Sir Fur! It is spring and they wished to share with you a trip they took in April of 2009. They were sailing across the Atlantic from Ft. Lauderdale to Lisbon and they quickly bonded with their suite stewardess. Every day we would return to find them up to some mischief. This particular day they thought they might try their hand at the crossing, but alas they tossed aside their oars and gave the 'wheel' back to the Captain.

FYI

**FACT: Any fabric blended from two natural fibers
Will not wrinkle
as badly as one that is 100% of
One natural fiber!**

Interesting Facts about April

There is uncertainty of how this month got its name it has been suggested that it may come from Roman word 'Aprilis' meaning 'to open', or it may come from Aphrodite, the Greek name for the goddess of love

It is the fourth month of the year in the Gregorian Calendar and is one of four months to have 30 days.

April's birthstone is the diamond. Its birth flowers are the daisy or the Sweet Pea.

In the USA a list compiled by the Social Security Administration in 2009 found April to be the 353rd most popular girl's name.

April is International Guitar Month. It is also the National month for Poetry, Mathematics Awareness, Sexual Assault Awareness, Volunteers and Arab-American Heritage.

The average global land and ocean temperature for April in the 20th century is 13.7°C (that's 56.66°F).

April 1st was used to celebrate the Birth of Christ up until 350 when Pope Julius I declared that Christ's birth would be celebrated on December 25.

April starts on the same day of the week as July in all years.



SWISS BEARLIN

52% Irish Linen/ 48% Swiss Cotton

Bear Threads has a Treasure Chest of Colors in Their Bearlin Fabric.
Choose from Black, White, Pink, Blue, Peach, Wintergreen,
Mais and Cream.

Visit us on the web at www.bearthreadsLtd.com

To place an order contact us at 404-255-5083 or 404-255-4001 fax

"Bear in Mind" articles are available on our website. Encourage your customers to check out our website for information and inspiration.