Cotton comes from a plant, so it is called a natural fiber. Some other textile materials are wool and silk, which come from animals. These are called animal fibers. Synthetic fibers are not natural, nor do they come from animals. They are man-made fibers. Of all these kinds of fibers, cotton is often thought to make the most comfortable and lightweight clothing.
Cotton grows primarily in the warm lands of the southern and southwestern United States. This area, known as the “Cotton Belt,” runs from northern Florida up to Virginia and back west to California. Large cotton farms are found in Texas, California, the Mississippi River valley, and southern Arizona.

Around the world, cotton is grown in 70 countries. China produces the most—more than 25 percent of all the cotton grown in the world. The United States produces almost 20 percent of the world’s total.

Muslin is one of the first cotton fabrics; it was first woven in Iraq, where people made lightweight clothing for life in desert regions.

Catechu is a brown dye that is made by boiling small bits of wood from the acacia tree; adding certain metals to the mixture adds yellow or green to the brown color.
The cotton plant belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus (a flower) and okra (a vegetable). Of the 30 different species, or kinds, of cotton, only three are farmed. One species, _Gossypium hirsutum_, makes up about 90 percent of the cotton grown worldwide. In the U.S., cotton is planted in the spring and harvested in the late summer and early fall. A cotton plant is a little tree three to six feet (1–2 m) tall.

The plant adapts well to poor soil, but it needs a lot of sunlight and water. In areas where little rain falls, farmers use irrigation systems to bring water to their land.

Weeds are killed with herbicides and a process called “flaming.” As cotton plants grow, their stems harden. At this time the field can be “flamed,” or burned with a quick burst of fire that kills weeds but doesn’t hurt the cotton plants.
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*COTTON WEAPON*

Guncotton was an explosive invented by Christian Schönbein in 1845. It was made by mixing cotton with various acids, but it proved to be too dangerous to use!
COTTON ART

Batik (bah-TEEK) is a cloth made by pouring hot wax over fabric in a pattern and then dyeing the cloth. The dye doesn’t soak into the wax, so a pattern is left on the cloth when the wax is lifted.

Above, batik fabrics
Right, cotton square

As the plants grow, they produce little buds, called “squares.” These buds bloom into flowers that start out creamy white or yellow and change to pink or dark red. As time passes, the flower falls off, leaving a tiny pod-like growth. This pod, shaped like a football, is where the cotton fibers will grow.

In a month or two, the pod breaks open and a fluffy fiber is the beginning of cotton. Lint, and shorter fibers called “linters,”
A month or two, the pod breaks open into a "cotton boll." This pure white fluffy fiber is the beginning of cotton as we know it. The long white seed hairs on the cotton plant are called “lint.” They cover up many black or brown seeds. Lint, and shorter fibers called “linters,” are attached to the seeds.
Cotton is a hardy plant, but insects, fungi, and harsh weather can threaten its growth. Cotton thrives on sunlight and moisture, but too much rainfall can ruin plants. Heavy rains turn cotton a dirty gray color instead of its usual clean white.

This color change lowers the grade of the cotton, reducing the amount of cotton harvested. Too much rain can also get farm machinery into the muddy field. Cotton is the money paid to the farmers for their crop.
Cotton is a hardy plant, but insects, fungi, and harsh weather can threaten its growth. Cotton thrives on sunlight and moisture, but too much rainfall can ruin plants. Heavy rains turn cotton a dirty gray color instead of its usual clean white.

This color change lowers the grade of the cotton. Hard rains can decrease the amount of cotton harvested, and high moisture can allow damaging mold to spread. Too much rain can also make it difficult or impossible to get farm machinery into the muddy fields. All of these problems can mean less money paid to the farmers for their crops.
Insects are another danger. The cotton flowers and leaves hold nectar, something that many insects love to eat. The boll weevil, a type of beetle, is especially harmful. Boll weevils lay their eggs inside the cotton boll. When the young eat their way out, the plant is killed.

Pesticides help to control boll weevils, but the bugs can become resistant and hard to control. In addition, the pesticides often kill many other bugs that can actually be helpful to cotton because they eat the boll weevils.
Bollworms, the pink larvae, or young, of a moth, are also difficult to control. Soon after hatching from their eggs, the larvae burrow into the cotton bolls. Pesticides don't always reach them in time to save the plants. The bollworm-tobacco budworm attacks both cotton and another southern crop—tobacco plants. Armyworms and red spiders also attack cotton. Farmers must take care to control these insects while at the same time ensuring the safety of the plants and the environment.