CORK

Cork Fabric Facts

What's the big deal about cork?
Cork comes from the bark of the cork oak tree. Native to Mediterranean forests, the bark of cork oak trees evolved to protect itself from the harsh conditions of the region and has unique properties not found in other natural materials. It's lightweight, rot and termite resistant, impermeable, buoyant, elastic, and fire resistant. Most importantly, it's a renewable resource.

Generally, cork is harvested by hand with a long-handled hatchet used to cut sections out of the bark. Highly skilled workers are careful not to damage the inner layer of the bark, or it may not grow back. When a tree is around 25 years old, the bark is stripped and can continue to be stripped once every 9 years. Many of these trees live for 200-300 years, which means one tree can be harvested over 16 times—and by many generations.

Harvesting cork from trees helps increase the tree's life expectancy and the natural ecosystem, providing a perfect habitat for many endangered animals. It's estimated that cork oak forests retain up to 14 million tons of CO₂ every year which also contributes to the reduction of the Greenhouse Effect.

How is cork fabric made?
After the cork is harvested, the planks are air dried for approximately 6 weeks before being sent to a processing facility where the cork is boiled without the use of harsh chemicals to remove the rough outer layer. This process expands the cork cells, softening the material and making it easier to work with. From there, the bark is then shaved into very thin sheets and arranged and bonded to a polyester/cotton backing for elasticity, strength, and stability. After this, the cork can be dyed into colors, inlaid with metallic, or printed to create a variety of appearances.

Some cork is not bonded to a woven backing and only has a polyurethane coated backing. These products are made for wall covering use and are not suitable for sewing into bags or other items.

Characteristics of Cork Fabric:

• Normally about 50% cork and 50% fabric backing with other bonding chemicals to adhere the face to the back.

• Biodegradable, anti-static, and hypoallergenic.

• Can be sewn with a sewing machine, painted on, stenciled, die-cut, stamped, wood-burned or colored with pencils and permanent markers.

• Naturally waterproof. Although it cannot be laundered due to the processing it has undergone. If laundered, the cork will peel away from the fabric backing.

• Easy to clean. Simply wipe with a damp cloth and allow to air dry.

• Great for bags, upholstery, covered boxes and many other crafty items.