



Extension News Column

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Re: Pinching Pennies

Blue jeans — they are a staple in our wardrobe, but sometimes choosing them is confusing. If you've ever been intimidated by that sea of blue when shopping for jeans, here are a few things to consider before your next shopping trip.

One of my readers shared a story from a trip to buy jeans. He was purchasing a pair of \$30 jeans when he struck up a conversation with a clerk in the men's department. She referred to a \$195 pair of denims as not a pair of jeans, but rather an emerging men's casual style. They were not to be worn when working on a car or other dirty work, just as a casual style. I guess if I had spent \$200 for a pair of jeans, I sure wouldn't be wearing them for yard work, either. Getting the most wear from your purchase is important.

All clothing should be purchased by considering not just the cost of the garment, but the cost per wearing. Spending \$50 for a pair of jeans may seem like a lot of money. But if you wear them once a week for two years that is 100 wearings, or a cost of \$.50 per wearing. A real bargain! If you have your eye on a more expensive pair, be sure to do the math to see if you will get your money's worth out of them. The worst case scenario is buying those \$195 jeans and finding that you only wear them a few times.

A recent story in Consumer Reports investigated the cost of blue jeans. Their investigation showed that one company made jeans under two labels with the same specifications. One pair sold for \$200 under a designer label and the other sold for \$30 at a mass merchandiser. The only difference between the two was the back pocket.

It becomes important that you can recognize the signs of quality in purchasing jeans. Let's consider the basics of what make jeans last.

All jeans are made of cotton denim. However, the quality of the cotton the denim is made of will affect the look and feel of the jeans. Fine cotton fabric is made from longer strands of the fiber, giving the jean fabric a softer feeling and a smoother look. High-quality cotton also lasts longer because there are fewer small fibers to rub off — this is often what you are paying for when you buy premium jeans.

All jeans are made from cotton twill — a weave that has a slight diagonal to it. Check the wrong side of your jeans to clearly see the twill. Some denim is a left-hand twill (the diagonal on the dark side runs from lower right to the upper left), which has a very soft feel. Other denim is a right-hand twill (the diagonal on the dark side runs from the lower left to the upper right), which is the most common and has a durable feel. So if you want the jeans to feel good, choose a left-hand twill. If you want it to last a long time, choose a right-hand twill.

Most denim is yarn dyed, that is dyed before it is woven into fabric. That shows up as the characteristic blue yarns in the length and the white threads woven across. Jeans dyed after construction may have a more saturated color, but it may also fade faster. That is why black jeans tend to fade so fast, they are overdyed, that is dyed after the fabric is made.

Fit is a personal issue. Jeans should fit smoothly and comfortably. The fashion magazines cover this subject well, so I'll leave that to them.

Just as with other clothing, there is a correct way to wash jeans. Jeans can fade in the wash, and holes will fray easily on rough cycles. The first time you wash your jeans, wash them alone. After that, it's a good idea to wash them inside out, as this is the best possible way to maintain their color and overall look.

When you dry jeans, get the excess water out by using the dryer for a few minutes, but let them air dry for most of the way. Lay your jeans on a towel to dry or, if possible, hang them with clothespins so that no part of the jean is folded over. When they air dry, you prevent shrinking and they'll stay in excellent condition for much longer.

Jeans are among the most versatile piece of clothing we own. Make sure your jeans are comfortable, durable and flattering.

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