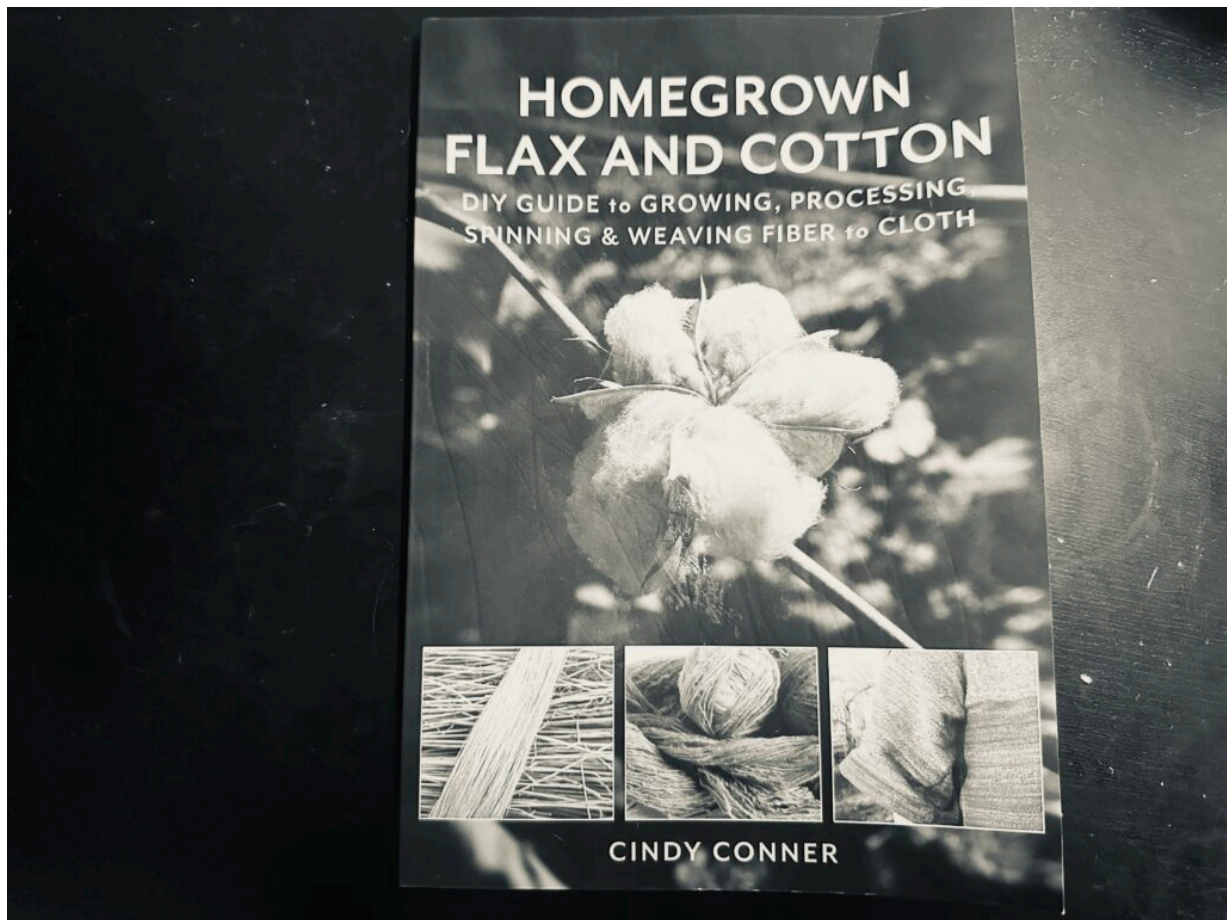


# Book Review: Homegrown Flax and Cotton



Every once in a while, I get to marry multiple interests. For example, I have long loved crochet and believe in the slow yarn movement. Every now and then, I can combine that with gardening. I shared a bit of that with you when I did a book review of [A Garden to Dye For](#). Today, I'll share more with a book review of Homegrown Flax and Cotton by Cindy Conner.

## What Is Slow Yarn?

[Slow yarn](#), like the slow food movement, refers to engaging in yarn crafting mindfully and sustainably. It's part of an overall sustainable lifestyle. And it celebrates doing things by hand. Crochet and knitting are already slow crafts. After all, it takes a lot longer to create a handmade sweater than

it does to just go buy one. However, you can extend that into a longer, more involved slow yarn process.

For example, in the book [Unraveling](#), author Peggy Orenstein shares her slow yarn story. She first learns how to shear a sheep, which is no easy task. After learning, she shears enough to collect wool to make a sweater. She cleans the wool. Then she learns how to spin it. After that, she learns how to dye it. Finally, she is ready to knit it into a sweater. That's an example of slow yarn.

## **Slow Yarn in the Garden**

Wool isn't the only fiber that you can use to knit or crochet. In fact, there are many other great natural fibers that offer various benefits when crafting. Cotton is a favorite choice when making lightweight summer clothes as well as kitchen towels. Therefore, you can incorporate gardening into a slow yarn movement of your own. Cindy Conner's book "Homegrown Flax and Cotton" is all about this.

## **Homegrown Flax and Cotton by Cindy Conner**

This book is subtitled: "DIY Guide to Growing, Processing, Spinning and Weaving Fiber to Cloth." Or, as a description of the book puts it, you learn how to go "from seed to shirt." That pretty much sums up what this book is about. It teaches us how to grow either flax or cotton in our own gardens. Then, we learn how to actually take that material from plant form into yarn form. Finally, there are tips for weaving it to create a cloth. However, once you have the spun cotton or flax yarn, you could also knit or crochet with it. As a crocheter, that would be my personal plan.

# Flax vs. Cotton for Growing Your Own Fiber

The book explains that both flax and cotton are easier than you might expect to grow in your own garden. The author explains that if you live in a colder climate, then you will probably want to try growing flax. In contrast, cotton is best grown in a warmer environment. Of course, if you live in a more temperate climate, then you could choose either one (or both).

Some of the other key differences, besides temperature requirements, of flax vs. cotton include:

- Flax has a shorter growing season, smaller flowers, and is usually a physically shorter plant than the cotton plant. Cotton plants actually have really pretty flowers that turn into the cotton.
- Generally speaking, cotton requires more garden space to grow. That said, flax tends to have a lower yield than cotton. As a result, you will need to plant more in order to get the same amount of yarn.
- Flax prefers well-draining, fertile soil with a slightly acidic to neutral pH range (around 6-7). It requires regular watering, particularly during its early growth stages. Cotton, on the other hand, prefers well-drained, loamy soil with good moisture retention. It has a higher water demand than flax and requires consistent watering throughout its growing season.
- Both flax and cotton can be susceptible to certain pests. However, the pests are different for each. Flax may attract insects like aphids, thrips, and flea beetles. Cotton can be affected by pests such as bollworms, aphids, and spider mites.
- Flax is a self-pollinating plant. Cotton, on the other hand, typically requires cross-pollination by bees or other [pollinators](#) to produce a good yield of cotton

bolts.

- The harvesting and processing methods are different for each, which the book explains in greater detail.

## **8 Gardening Things to Learn From Homegrown Flax and Cotton**

You'll have to read the book to get all of the details. In brief, though, here are eight things you'll learn about related to the gardening of cotton and flax:

1. If farm-to-table gardening and eating makes sense to you, then garden-to-garment will make sense as well. The textile industry does a lot of harm to the planet. You can help by growing your own fiber and making your own clothes.
2. In case you weren't already familiar with it, growing flax means that you'll be making clothes out of linen. Notably, you will not also be able to eat flax seeds from this plant. That's because there are two different flax plants – one that's edible and another that's for fiber.
3. For both plants, you want soil that is rich and ready to go in spring. You can use autumn leaves to cover the beds through the winter, preparing the soil for spring planting. However, if you live in an especially cold area, then you might instead plant "winter-kill" crops like forage radish, winter rye and oats.
4. You can plant flax in rows or by scattering the seeds. However, rows might make more sense as a beginner because it's tough to tell what's flax and what's weeds at first. That said you want a really dense planting so that the stalks are crowded together and don't get too wide.
5. You can get seeds for white, green, or brown cotton. The author thinks it's more fun to spin with the color, but you can choose what works for you. Make sure that you

get cotton seeds that are NOT genetically modified.

6. If you know how to plant tomatoes, then you should find it relatively easy to learn to plant cotton!
7. If you've never seen a cotton plant grow before, then you might find the whole process surprisingly exciting. It goes through interesting stages of flowering.
8. Did you know that in some states there are restrictions on planting cotton even in your own backyard garden?! If you live in a cotton-growing state, you should look into the rules before proceeding.

## Read More:

- [Colorfast vs. Fugitive Dyes From Plants](#)
- [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
- [5 Fun Ways to Use Yarn in the Garden](#)