

Tweed

Tweed is a rough, unfinished woolen fabric, of a soft, open, flexible texture resembling cheviot or homespun, but more closely woven. It is made in either plain or twill weave and may have a check or herringbone pattern. Subdued, interesting color effects (heather mixtures) are obtained by twisting together differently colored woolen strands into a two- or three-ply yarn.

Tweeds are desirable for informal outerwear, being moisture-resistant and very durable. Once worn in, tweeds are commonly worn for outdoor activities such as pheasant shooting and hunting, in both Ireland and the United Kingdom. "Lovat" is the name given to the green used in traditional Scottish tweed.

Tweed patterns are registered much the same as a tartan. The colors used in the patterns are meant to reflect a region or use. Since tweeds were traditionally worn for hunting and gaming, the colors were meant to camouflage the wearer based on the native habitat of the region. Some tweeds, therefore, have higher amounts of greens or browns depending on the vegetation.

The original name was *tweel*, the Scots for 'twill', the cloth being woven in a twilled rather than a plain pattern. The current name came about almost by chance, according to a tale recounted in *Windsor Revisited*, written by HRH The Duke of Windsor. About 1830, a London merchant received a letter from a Hawick firm about some *tweels*. The London merchant misinterpreted the handwriting, understanding it to be a trade-name taken from the name of the River Tweed which flows through the Scottish Borders textile areas, subsequently the goods were advertised as Tweed, the name has remained so ever since.

Tweed, also according to the Duke, was a favorite material of both his grandfather King Edward VII and his father, King George V.

There are three basic forms of tweed:

Harris Tweed

A luxury cloth handwoven by the islanders on the Isles of Harris, Lewis, Uist and Barra in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, using local wool. Formerly, Harris Tweed was also handspun and hand dyed with local natural dyes, especially lichens. More about Harris Tweed below.

Donegal tweed

A handwoven tweed manufactured in County Donegal, Ireland. Like the Outer Hebrides, Donegal has for centuries been producing tweed from local materials. Sheep thrive in the hills and bogs of Donegal, and indigenous plants such as blackberries, fuchsia, gorse (whins), and moss provide dyes. Magee of Donegal, located in Donegal Town in Ulster, is the most famous tweed manufacturer in Ireland.

Silk tweed

A fabric made of raw silk with flecks of color typical of woolen tweeds.



Traditional Harris Tweed was characterized by subtle flecks of color achieved through the use of vegetable dyes, including the lichen dyes called "crotle" (which give deep red- or purple-brown and rusty orange). These lichens are the origin of the distinctive scent of older Harris Tweed. Yes, the older tweeds also had a distinctive smell...especially when wet.

Every length of cloth produced is stamped with the official Orb symbol, trademarked by the Harris Tweed Association in 1909, when Harris Tweed was defined as "hand-spun, hand-woven and dyed by the crofters and cottars in the Outer Hebrides".



In 2004 Nike used the fabric to update a trainer called *The Terminator*, a basketball shoe from the 1980s. I'm sure they had an entirely different smell.