

How To Decipher Clothing Care Labels

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The next time you do clothes shopping, you might see care labels using pictorial symbols instead of the written word.

As of July 1, clothing made in North America that's sold in Canada or Mexico in addition to the United States must have care labels in English, French and Spanish or use symbols developed by the American Society of Testing and Materials. The care symbols are similar to those used internationally, but are more comprehensive and include the Fahrenheit scale for wash-water temperatures.

"For the first 18 months, hang tags will indicate what the symbols mean," said Joyce Smith, clothing specialist for Ohio State University Extension. After that, consumers will be on their own. "Initially, consumers may find the new care label system a little confusing," Smith said. "But the system is logical once you understand the basic symbols."

The symbols are composed of five basic geometric shapes, marked with various lines and dots to indicate care instructions. For example, dots inside the symbols for washing and drying indicate temperature — the more dots, the higher the temperature. Horizontal lines underneath those symbols indicate that more gentle treatment is needed for the garment.

"Think of the lines as a 'minus' sign," Smith said. "The more lines, the gentler the treatment."

At first glance the symbols can look complicated, but there's rhyme and reason behind them. For example:

—Washing instructions come



































in a shape similar to a wash tub, complete with waves on top. A tub with one line underneath indicates the permanent press cycle should be used. A tub with two lines underneath indicates the delicate/gentle cycle. A tub with a hand reaching into it means hand-washing is recommended.

Dots inside the wash tub indicate temperature: one dot for 65 F to 85 F; two dots for 105 F; three dots for 120 F; and four dots for 140 F. These temperatures are comparable to today's "cold," "cool," "warm" and "hot."

—A triangle symbol is used for bleaching instructions. An open triangle means any bleach can be used. A triangle with diagonal lines through it means only non-chlorine bleach can be used. A dark triangle with an X over it indicates no bleach should be used.

—Drying instructions come in a square. A square with a circle inside means the garment can be tumble dried. As with the washer symbol, a line or two underneath the square indicates a permanent press or gentle cycle is recommended, and dots within the circle indicate temperature to be used. A square with a curved line along the top indicates line drying is recommended. "Drip dry" is indicated with three vertical lines inside a square, and "dry flat" is indicated with one horizontal line across a square.

—Ironing instructions are indicated with a symbol that looks a lot like an iron. Dots again indicate temperature, and an X superimposed over the symbol indicates the garment should not be ironed. An iron symbol with two diagonal lines underneath it and an X through the lines means the gar-

CONSUMER GUIDE TO CARE SYMBOLS														
 Wash	Machine wash cycles  normal  permanent press  delicate/gentle	 hand wash	Warning symbols for laundering  do not wash  do not bleach  do not dry (used with do not wash)  do not iron											
	Water temperatures (maximum) symbols (•)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>(140F)</td> <td>(120F)</td> <td>(105F)</td> <td>(85F-95F)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>••••</td> <td>•••</td> <td>••</td> <td>•</td> </tr> <tr> <td>60C</td> <td>50C</td> <td>40C</td> <td>30C</td> </tr> </table>		(140F)	(120F)	(105F)	(85F-95F)	••••	•••	••	•	60C	50C	40C
(140F)	(120F)	(105F)	(85F-95F)											
••••	•••	••	•											
60C	50C	40C	30C											
 Bleach	 any bleach when needed  only non-chlorine bleach when needed		Additional instructions (in symbols or words)  do not wring  do not tumble dry  In the shade (added to line dry, drip dry, or dry flat)  no steam (added to iron)											
	 Dry	Tumble dry cycles  normal  permanent press  delicate/gentle		 line dry/hang to dry  drip dry  dry flat										
 Iron		Iron-dry or steam maximum temperature  200 C (390 F) high  150 C (300 F) medium  110 C (230 F) low		Warning symbol  do not dryclean										
	 Dryclean	Dryclean  normal cycle any solvent	Professionally dryclean —requires modified drycleaning reduce moisture  short cycle no steam finishing  low heat any solvent except trichloroethylene  P petroleum solvent only  F											

Note: This figure illustrates the symbols used for laundering and drycleaning instructions. As a minimum, laundering instructions include, in order, four symbols: washing, bleaching, drying, and ironing; and, drycleaning instructions include one symbol. Additional symbols or words may be used to clarify the instruction.

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ment can be ironed on the "no steam" setting.

—A circle indicates the garment should be dry cleaned. Letters within the circle indicate to professional dry cleaners what solutions should be used. An "A" means any solvent can be used;

"P" indicates any solvent but trichloroethylene can be used; and "F" means petroleum solvents must be used.

Consumers can benefit from the symbols in a number of ways, Smith said.

"The symbols can fit on fewer or smaller garment labels," she said. "International travelers also will be able to understand the care requirements of textile items purchased while visiting other countries."



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