

Conclusions of Fabric Study By Michele Murdock

The biggest conclusion I made was that in one year the effects of direct sunlight on fabric are far more damaging than twenty-five times of being washed in cold water and dried in a low heat dryer.

From the sun tests, the set that did the worst as far as color fading went was from the Keepsake Calico collection at JoAnn's. It was amazing to me the difference only one year had made. In comparison, the cotton from Moda (quilt shop quality fabric) fared the best of all the sun tests and looked almost as good as the original (except for a black piece that had turned brownish). Of the rest of the cotton samples, the ones from Hobby Lobby seemed to hold their color better as a whole than samples from JoAnn's and Walmart, but about the same as Connecting Threads. However, the flannel sample from Hobby Lobby faded horribly and was far worse than those tested from JoAnn's, Connecting Threads, and high quality quilting stores. The flannel samples that had the least amount of fading were Moda (high quality) and Connecting Threads.

In all of the washing tests, the only fabric that looked noticeably worn or faded was the Hobby Lobby flannel (which was pilling badly and faded) and the Keepsake Calico from JoAnn's. Also, the cotton samples from Connecting Threads seemed to have bled within each fabric, but not onto each other. All other washing tests looked similar to the control group (except for having shrunk).

I was surprised that the high quality batiks faded as much as they did in the sun tests. In fact, the batiks from Connecting Threads did as well or slightly better as far as color fading went. In comparing the washing tests, both of these batik samples looked pretty equal with little or no fading.

The Walmart tests performed very average in comparison to other samples. However, if I had performed a wear and tear test, I'm afraid these might not have held up very well. The samples I used appeared to be very thin and looked loosely woven.

Many of you may be afraid to buy JoAnn's fabric after my findings, but it was only the Keepsake Calico that did below average in my tests. I also tested two random cotton samples as well as flannel, which all performed very average. I did not test their more expensive fabric that they advertise as "Premium Quilting Fabric". Based on the prices, this fabric may be comparable to high quality quilt shop fabric. There are so many more tests that could be done!

In conducting this study various things could have been done differently and the findings are by no means hard answers about how fabric will react from different stores in all cases. I wish I had tested more high quality quilt fabric to see if they consistently held their color better than lower quality fabric. My study didn't address things like normal wear and tear (strength of fabric) or shrinkage, so there is a lot more that can be learned. The only definitive answer I can give is to keep your fabric and quilts out of direct sunlight. That is the factor that seems to play a major roll in keeping your fabric looking the best for the longest amount of time. So, depending on what your quilt or fabric projects are, you should be able to make better informed decisions on what fabric will be most suitable for your project.