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Cotton Hose Enlist Glamour

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COTTON hose are getting their share of the limelight now that our country is at war with the nation which supplied us with silk.

The American woman is going to draw a breath of relief when she finds that the new cotton hose will not be ill-fitting and fuzzy as were the cotton stockings of the past. The fuzziness is gone and the hose fit with glove-like smoothness.

The idea of cotton hose replacing silk ones is not new. As early as 1938, the United States Bureau of Home Economics set up a new line of research to see what could be done to improve cotton stockings, with the idea of utilizing more of America's surplus cotton crop. Money was appropriated for the stocking research by the Agricultural Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives.

The job was headed by Ruth O'Brien, former head of the Department of Textile Chemistry here, and present chief of the Textiles and Clothing Division of the Bureau. David H. Young accepted the position of chief hosiery technician for the Bureau of Home Economics.

The Beltsville Maryland Research Center outside of Washington has a miniature hosiery mill which has produced an astonishingly large number of attractive hose. In addition to bright colored campus socks for girls, there are good looking plain knits in sheer and service weights. There are socks for men and hose with many varieties of novelty knits. Many are of unusual shades. Some have ankles that are embroidered, and some are modern versions of the decorative “clock” which were once so popular with women.

The use of full-fashioned designs for the hose has overcome one of the biggest objections women have always had to cotton stockings. Now they are “knit to fit” the leg as are the best silk stockings.

Mr. Young's designs have been worked out so that the stockings can be knit on machines commonly used for silk, thus demonstrating the possibility of changing American knitting machines from silk over to cotton.

Part of the attractiveness of the new cotton hose is due to the use of only the best, long-stapled cotton yarn in their manufacture. These yarns have been combed, mercerized, and gassed in all the experiments. Mercerization gives them an attractive luster and gassing removes the fuzzy short ends of cotton.

The best grade of cotton stocking is manufactured from a yarn that has been highly twisted. This twisting makes the yarn more durable and increases the elastic properties of the finished product. On stocking counters, these hose made of highly twisted yarn are known as “lisle” hose.

Mr. Young is best known for the great variety of stocking designs he has originated. The stocking's design affects its durability, elasticity, general comfort and attractiveness. Hosiery manufacturers have already received many design specifications from the research center, and will later be using Mr. Young's Dictionary of Design which is to contain designs for about 500 different stockings.

Practical hosiery buyers, however, want their stockings to be more than trim-fitting, comfortable and attractive. They want them to wear well too.

Hosiery in the research center ran the gauntlet of laboratory tests. One laboratory test measures the amount of rub a stocking will take on the toe and heel, and another tests the stocking's elastic properties by stretching it out of shape and letting it snap back into shape. By experiments like these the workers have been able to determine in a short period of time how a stocking will stand up under miles of walking, and whether or not it will have an adequate amount of “give” over the knees without becoming baggy.

From a series of tests and experiments, one hosiery design has been completed which combines the best points of several stockings studied. This is Government Style 112 which is an all-white hose designed for nurses, dietitians and laboratory technicians. This stocking has larger and stronger reinforcements in the foot and a stretch welt. It is now on sale in stores all over the country.

The Bureau is releasing the designs for the hose and the manufacturers are taking over from there.

Miss O'Brien has stated that really good cotton stockings will not be the cheapest on the market, because it is the labor that goes into the stocking's manufacture that makes the difference in cost. The labor is much the same for a good pair of full-fashioned cotton stockings as it is for a similar quality of silk hose, according to the manufacturers.