

LIFESTYLE



The Most Sustainable Fibre You’ve Never Heard Of: Chiengora

by [Sheri Radford](#) / Jul 4, 2022

This fibre is going to the dogs—in the best way possible

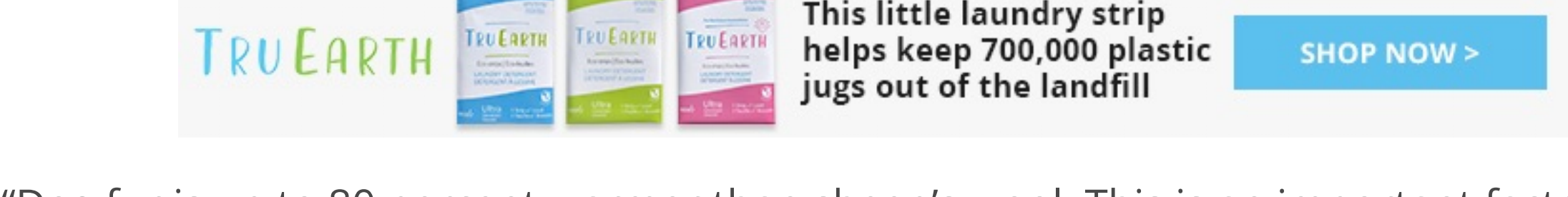
If you live with a long-haired pet, then put away your vacuum cleaner and get out your pet brush, because an extremely sustainable fibre is already in abundant supply in your own home. Dubbed *chiengora*—which combines *chien* (French for *dog*) with *angora*—the yarn or wool spun from dog hair is warm, soft and fuzzy, not to mention plentiful for most pet owners. And no, it doesn't smell like wet dog.

People have been making chiengora for a long time, though the practice fell out of favour when sheep’s wool started to become readily available. Before the 1800s, the Coast Salish people of what is now British Columbia and Washington State commonly kept [Salish Woolly dogs](#) and blended the animals' hair with other fibres, such as mountain goat hair, before weaving it into clothing and blankets.



Photo by Ayla Verschuuren on Unsplash

More recently, crafters have rediscovered dog hair as a uniquely sustainable fibre for knitting, crocheting and weaving. Sustainably minded DIYers delight in transforming this “garbage” into garments. Even vegans who won't wear traditional wool have to admit that gathering up the fur a pet sheds naturally does not harm or exploit animals in any way. In fact, most pets love the attention that comes with a little extra brushing.



“Dog fur is up to 80 percent warmer than sheep's wool. This is an important factor to consider when planning a project with your very special and unique yarn,” Sandra and Harry Choron write in [Planet Dog: A Doglopedia](#). “Dog breeds that make the best yarn are Bouvier des Flandres, Chow Chows, Border Collies, Australian Shepherd Dogs, Shih Tzus, and Newfoundlands.”

To be turned into yarn, dog hair must be gathered, washed, carded and spun. The longest, softest fibres work best, and brushings tend to be softer than clippings. If a pooch is short-haired, then the hair needs to be blended with brushings from a long-haired dog (or other animal) in order to work. The whole concept of chiengora may seem strange at first, but it's no odder than making wool from sheep, goats, alpacas, muskoxen or rabbits.

“Clothes made from a critter you know and love are just so much more special than clothes from some anonymous sheep. What could be more delightful than wearing mittens from your Malamute, or a sweater from your Samoyed?” Kendall Crolius and Anne Montgomery write in [Knitting with Dog Hair](#). “Every knitter knows the feeling of satisfaction you get from wearing a sweater you’ve made yourself. Well, if you multiply that feeling about 10 times you’ll get a sense of what it’s like to wear a sweater that was formerly Fido.”

The book explains all the steps required to turn dog hair into usable yarn. It also includes instructions for DIY projects such as a tam, a jacket and (most adorably) a sweater for a dog, along with a comprehensive guide to dog breeds, indicating each one's potential for pet-spun yarn.

Using your precious pup's fur to knit a one-of-a-kind garment can be viewed as part of [slow fashion](#). Combatting the many harmful effects of fast fashion—on both people and the planet—this burgeoning movement is [changing how we think about clothing](#): encouraging consumers to buy fewer clothes, of higher quality, that were ethically made, that truly spark joy.

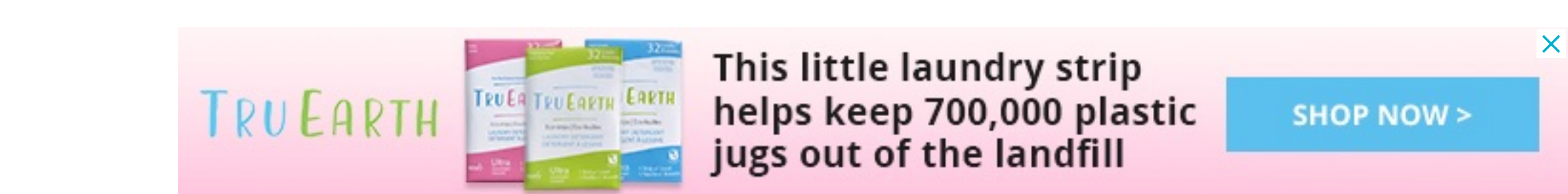


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And dog owners don't have a monopoly on sustainable materials. In [Crafting with Cat Hair](#), Kaori Tsutaya explains how to create cat fur felt and use it to make finger puppets, tote bags, mittens, scarves and more.

Tsutaya emphasizes how eco-friendly the felt is. “If you’ve been thinking of throwing away a favorite wool sweater because it has moth holes eaten through it, don’t toss it out! You can easily patch up those holes by hiding them under cat hair felt—and wear your sweater with pride,” she writes. “If a lot of people enjoy making crafts out of cat hair instead of throwing fur balls out with the garbage, together we can play a role in decreasing the amount of trash in the world.”

If your interest in creating yarn from dog or cat hair has been piqued, [follow these instructions](#) or watch one of the many how-to videos on YouTube. If you decide you'd rather let someone else do the cleaning, carding, spinning and knitting while you focus on collecting the fur, Google can point you to a spinner in your area who works with chiengora. Some spinners also offer workshops, either in person or online.



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