

Hemp

the miracle plant



Few can dispute hemp's healing qualities and versatility. Two entrepreneurs who have founded their companies using different aspects of this plant explain just why it's their super hero.

FABRICS

Emma Parkinson is the Director of BohoHemp, an online organic and fairtrade hemp clothing company. www.bohohemp.co.uk

It's never been a secret what hemp can do. Its just... well, I challenge you to find a plant more useful and adaptable and yet more misunderstood than hemp. Surrounded by innuendo and years of cliché the hemp plant is more than, and different to, its errant psychotropic cousin. It has been suggested that there are over 25,000 uses for hemp. No longer just a fringe fibre, hemp has gone mainstream on the High Street and up market with the likes of Versace and Habitude including it in their collections.

US states such as Oregon, North Dakota, Vermont, Montana and West Virginia have followed a growing appreciation of hemp's worth and backed its legal cultivation for industrial use. However, they have not yet begun to grow the crop due to resistance from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The irony is that, historically, this plant was once regarded by many in the US as more important than corn and soya, and was also a vital part of the Second World War effort. The first American flag was even made from hemp! Then, in 1941, that most iconic of American industrialists, Henry Ford, produced a car with a plastic frame partially made of hemp and an engine which could be powered by hemp fuel.

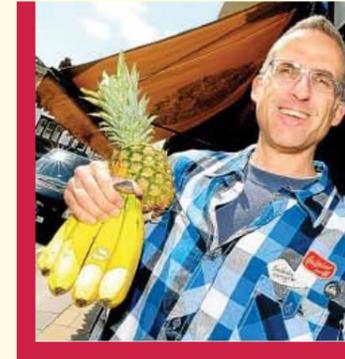
Reclassification in some American states is however, bringing hemp out of the shadows. Manufacturers within the 30 countries who currently manufacture industrial hemp, design anything from hemp nappies, hemp protein foods, hemp oil to hemp houses made from hempcrete. Oh, and clothes! Manufacturers are very keen to explore alternatives to increasingly costly cotton, whilst being mindful of the need to satisfy environmental demands. Working with hemp, as with other plants such as flax, manufacturers have found ways to create incredibly silky, smooth materials.

In Europe, the approach to hemp has been more forgiving – years of productive engagement and honing its use, have yielded some beautiful textiles. Getting the best out of hemp as a clothing fabric has seen it blended with cotton, wool and silk. The hairy, fibre image associated with knotted rope and lifeless hippy clothing is a thing of the past as hemp appreciation develops and it becomes a future fabric.

What are the environmental advantages of hemp as a fabric?

- Hemp is the super star of eco-fabrics. Hemp is so green it has actually been used as a carbon-negative crop. It requires no pesticides, little weeding, and grows like the dickens. It even enriches the soil it leaves behind.
- Hemp has been used for millennia in clothing around the world, and requires no chemicals to be spun into cloth.
- It is both biodegradable and non-toxic.
- It is one of the most durable natural fibres that exist with high tensile strength. Hemp softens with use yet remains hard-wearing.
- Hemp fabrics dye very effectively and retain colour well over time.
- Hemp garments breathe due to the fibre's porous nature.
- Hemp cloth stays cool in warm weather as well as retaining heat in cooler weather.
- Hemp clothing naturally stops up to 95% of the sun's harmful UV light.

You don't have to compromise on fashion and principles anymore. You can look good and know that your purchase of hemp garments helps in the development of sustainable products through conscious consumerism. Let's be a part of something really significant and think about what we wear.



WELLBEING

Tim Barford is the founder of Yaoh – a range of hemp bodycare and food products. He is also the organiser of VegfestUK, which now has three events each year: Brighton, Bristol and London.

I've been eating hemp for around 20 years now, as well as using hemp bodycare. It is the most amazing seed there is – it has so many uses, but the main one is its nutritional value. People have been eating hemp seed on this planet for tens of thousands of years now, and indeed such is its incredible nutritional properties, whole tribes have survived famines by living off hemp seed. Even the Buddha managed to survive off a hemp seed a day for 6 years if the stories are to be believed. From personal experience though, the benefits of hemp seed are exceptional when you eat enough of it – no word of a lie.

optimum health

The best way to eat hemp seed is probably with its shell taken off, to reveal the white meat of the seed – what is known as a dehulled hemp seed, or shelled hemp seed. This way you can sprinkle them onto cereals, pasta, rice dishes, salads, into smoothies, in fact you can use them anywhere. They are best eaten raw, so you should avoid cooking with them really. Hemp seeds have a very high protein content, but they also have an excellent essential fatty acid content too – you know, the omega 3s, 6s and 9s you keep hearing about. Hemp seeds are ultra-rich in EFAs and also have a very balanced ratio of different fats too, ensuring that with long term use the fats remain at the right balance for optimum human health.

You can also access the EFA content of hemp seed through hemp oil. Again this is best used raw and can be added to salad dressings as well as to cooked foods once removed from the heat. Hemp oil has a slightly nutty flavour and must be used fresh – it can deteriorate quite quickly, and if your hemp oil is past its sell by date it's best not to use it. Hemp oil and seed should smell fresh and sweet, not bitter and rancid. If it smells fishy, this is a sign that the fats have deteriorated.

Hemp can also be used as a protein powder, with some ratios going up to 70% protein content. Hemp Protein powder is ideal for those looking to boost their protein content – hemp protein is very easily assimilable and the body laps it up. Protein is all about quality not quantity and the proteins in hemp – edestin and albumin – are both quality easily digestible proteins. This causes hemp to be a true super food of the 21st century, standing out from the others for all round performance and overall health benefits.

I find that eating lots of hemp can give you loads of extra energy, better stamina and brain function, more stable emotions, and plenty of lead in your pencil. It has provided me with the nutrients of which I felt lacking when I went vegan nearly 30 years ago – it was only 20 years ago I that started eating hemp and it made an immediate difference to my life, like it was the missing link in my diet. I would recommend eating large quantities of hemp to everyone but especially anyone who is transforming their diet and going plant based – hemp and all seeds are a big part of the vegan diet and must be eaten raw for full effect – smoothies are brilliant for this, because they smash the seed and make it even more easily digestible. I do hemp smoothie demos at many vegan events around the country including VegfestUK events – see www.vegfest.co.uk for details.

natural beauty

Hemp oil is also used a lot in bodycare and makes an excellent food for the skin – far better than the processed palm oil that fills so many bodycare products, even well known 'green' and 'natural' brands. Hemp makes a brilliant moisturiser and protects on a cellular level due to its high essential fatty acid content, therefore making an excellent choice for people of any skin type or age.

Yaoh: www.yaoh.co.uk – For organic hemp food products and bodycare.
BohoHemp: www.bohohemp.co.uk – An online organic and fairtrade hemp clothing company.
Good Hemp: www.goodwebsite.co.uk – For UK grown hemp food products.
Hempish: www.hempish.com – Stock a wide range of hemp bags, clothes and accessories.
The Hemp Shop: www.thehempshop.co.uk – An excellent one stop hemp shop.

