

textiles

Textile production involves harvesting crops, shearing sheep, raising silkworms, carding, spinning, spooling, dyeing, and weaving. The result: a panoply of sarapes, woolen rugs, embroidery, traditional Native clothing, as well as clothing of mixed ethnic origin.

fibers

In ancient Mesoamerica, artists used cotton, both white cotton and coffee-colored *coyuchi* cotton. In the 16th century, Spanish settlers introduced wool and silk. Today, all three fibers are used.

spinning

Having been beaten, carded, or boiled, the fibers are ready for spinning. This is accomplished with a *malacate*, or hand spindle, an instrument that consists of a wooden handle with a counterweight at the bottom. One hand turns the spindle constantly while the other pulls the fiber near the end of the handle. As the fiber is drawn out, it is stretched and twisted, producing one long thread. In some cases spinning is done using a distaff, a spindle introduced to Mexico by Spanish immigrants. Spinning wheels are also used.

dyeing

Natural dyes have been used to color yarn since pre-Hispanic times. Traditional dyeing methods continue today. The cochineal insect, for example, is still used to provide a deep red color and sea snails provide purple. Yellow is obtained from the *zacatlaxcalli* vine, red from annatto seeds, black from charcoal, and blue from indigo plants. Commercial dyes are also used.

weaving

Two looms are used to produce textiles:

Backstrap or Belt Loom: This loom is of ancient Mesoamerican origin and is used mostly by indigenous women in areas where traditional clothing is still made by hand. The loom is based on six pieces of wood and the warp threads themselves. One end is tied to a tree and the other to the waist of the weaver. The fabric is woven using the wooden pieces to pass the yarn, tighten the weave, and form the design. Both wool and cotton are used. Eleven different techniques have been developed on the backstrap loom, including brocade—an exacting art form.

Foot Pedal Loom: This instrument, introduced from Spain, allows artists to weave wider woolen fabrics. It is used to make shawls, *gabanes*, sarapes, ponchos, and tapestries.

products

Some textiles are woven as complete garments. Others become cloth stitched into garments. The traditional woman's dress, of ancient Mesoamerican origin, consists of the *huipil*, a *quechquemiltl* (poncho), an *enredo* (a seamless length of cloth used as a skirt), a belt, and, in some cases, a colorful headdress. Traditional men's attire includes pants, a shirt, a *ceñidor* (wide sash or belt), and a jacket. In some regions, items worn today are similar to those worn in ancient Mesoamerica.

One of the most unique garments is the *rebozo*, or shawl. The most famous *rebozos*, made of silk or *artisela* (a silk-like cellulose thread) and colored with natural dyes, are woven on backstrap looms in Santa Maria del Rio, San Luis Potosí. The State of Michoacán is known for its shiny striped *rebozos*, made from cotton and *artisela*. In Tenancingo, State of Mexico, artists create *laborcitas* (*rebozos* that require considerable labor), and *combinados* (*rebozos* that have a combination of complex designs).

Embroidery and tapestry also merit attention.

The Mazahua embroideries made by weavers from the State of Mexico are considered textiles, but they could also be seen as a kind of folk painting. These paintings are used to create miniature tapestries and to decorate the hemlines of skirts.