

# functional fabrics



By Zak Pence

Innovative fabrics have made their way into mainstream equestrian wear. Leather is being blended with spandex, and traditional fabrics like cotton are being replaced with bamboo. What was old is made new again, and you just might find yourself wearing a great vest made of salvaged plastic bottles. Clothing manufacturers are answering consumer demands to make it stronger, make it more comfortable and make it last. And, if you can avoid destroying the planet in the process, that's a plus too.

## Bamboo

Woven bamboo fabric may still be a novel concept to many, but this fast-growing grass is becoming popular in all segments of the clothing industry. Bamboo, which has natural antibacterial properties, and is very soft against the skin, requires far less chemical treatment to gain the desired softness, and causes fewer irritations than other natural fibers, according to green clothing retailer, G.R.A.S.S.

G.R.A.S.S. is the brainchild of Kerri Kent, founder of Oregon-based clothing manufacturer Kerrits. Their goal is to offer attractive clothing made from environmentally friendly, sustainable materials. G.R.A.S.S. pieces, including shirts, vests, tights and breeches, are available in a pallet of everyday wearable colors such as off-white, pebble gray, onyx, earth brown and purple. You can order online at [www.gra-ss.com](http://www.gra-ss.com).

Moxie Equestrian has also developed a line of bamboo clothing called Moxieboo. The line includes polos, tees and horse coolers. The horse cooler allows your horse to enjoy bamboo's benefits, as well. The touch of polyester added to the blend provides a smooth, silky feel, while pulling away excess sweat and preventing skin diseases. Visit [www.moxieequestrian.com](http://www.moxieequestrian.com) for more information.



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### Synthetics and blends

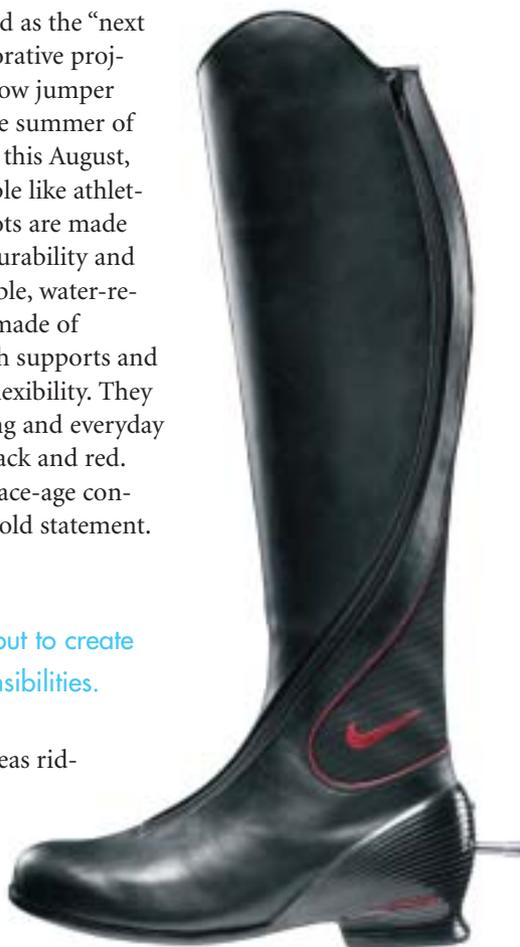
Microfibers, because of their soft feel and durability, are beginning to replace traditional leather components. For those who have sworn off the use of leather altogether, G.R.A.S.S. also offers the Waste-Not Tight made with Ultrasuede microfiber. Ultrasuede has been around since the 1970s, but few may know that this synthetic creates a smaller carbon footprint and creates less pollution than the process of tanning hides. On top of that, it's stain-resistant, machine washable and purportedly stronger than leather.

Synthetics are also put to good use in The Tretorn Boot from Equifit. Tretorn, touted as the "next generation of riding boots," is a collaborative project between Tretorn and top Swedish show jumper Malin Baryard. Debuted in Sweden in the summer of 2007, and recently introduced in the U.S. this August, these boots are extremely light, comfortable like athletic shoes and easy to maintain. Tretorn boots are made of high-tech microfibers for maximum durability and performance. They feature a thin, flexible, water-repellent upper, slip-proof outsole made of natural rubber, reinforced arch supports and are designed for maximum flexibility. They are suitable both for schooling and everyday use and come in two colors, black and red.

The Tretorn has a futuristic, maybe even superhero, look and space-age construction, sure to please riders looking for a boot that makes a bold statement. You can purchase Tretorn Boots at [www.equifit.net](http://www.equifit.net).

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New to the equestrian market, Nike just introduced the Ippeas riding boot for the 2008 Summer Olympics. After compiling ideas from top equestrian athletes, they set out to create the perfect modern boot that would not offend traditional sensibilities. The result was a mean looking boot with an adjustable titanium screw-in spur system with three adjustable positions, a full-length asymmetrical motocross inspired zipper and synthetic abrasive rubber on the inner side of the boot to provide superior grip and communication with the horse. Ippeas

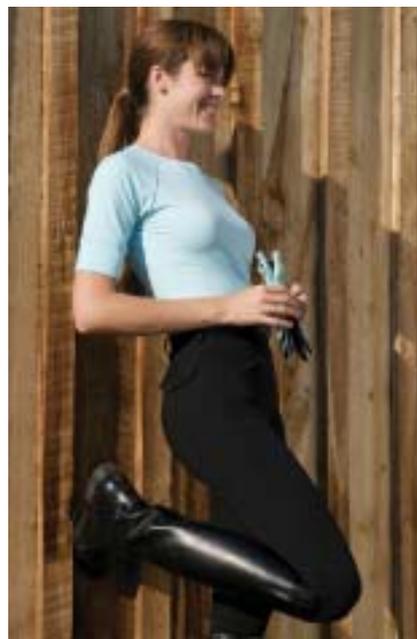




LEATHER with LYCRA® combines real leather with spandex to create a material with the look and feel of leather and excellent stretch and recovery capabilities.

(which means “rider” in Greek) is currently not available to the public, but you can check it out at the Nike Lab on [www.nike.com](http://www.nike.com).

And for those that love the advantages of synthetics but want to keep that traditional rustic look, LEATHER with LYCRA might be the perfect blend. LEATHER with LYCRA combines real leather with spandex to create a material with the look and feel of leather and excellent stretch and recovery capabilities. Machine washable, it doesn't lose its shape the way leather sometimes can. Latigo uses this sturdy fabric in their breeches and riding gloves. Check it out at [www.latigoequestrian.com](http://www.latigoequestrian.com).



### Recycled

Synthetics have another advantage over natural fibers. They can be recycled to produce new fabrics that are as good as new. This fall, Ariat International is rolling out Eco Thermal, made from recycled Polartec Power Dry fabric, which whisks away sweat from the wearer and allows it to dry twice as fast. Ariat utilizes the scraps from the yarn manufacturing process to create durable fabric that, according to the company, delivers superior moisture-wicking action and warmth. Eco Thermal clothing can also be recycled and can be used to produce new clothing instead of being discarded. Eco Thermal is currently available from Ariat in women's zip-top and vest. [www.ariat.com](http://www.ariat.com).



G.R.A.S.S. also has a recycled offering in the form of Ecolux, made of recycled Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), used most commonly in manufacturing soft drink containers. Blended with a small amount of spandex to create stretch and provide a form-fitting shape, Ecolux is very durable and, like Eco Thermal, draws sweat away from the body.



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## Infused

Now you can enjoy the outdoors without being eaten alive with Insect Shield Technology, manufactured by the Buzz Off Insect Shield company. Touted as “the most effective new tool in over 50 years in the battle against insects and insect-borne disease,” Insect Shield is an odorless and durable brand of insect repellent fabric. Rather than spray chemicals such as DEET, the main ingredient in OFF, directly on your body, you can now wear fabrics that keep bugs at bay all day. The clothing retains its repellent properties through 70 washings, and the active ingredient, Permethrin (a man-made version of a natural insect repellent found in certain chrysanthemums), is safe for humans and animals. Ariat International has a variety of products that utilize this technology, including bandanas, caps, hoodies, pullovers, tights and zip-tops.

Aside from smelling great, the sock is also designed with a padded heel for stirrup support and offers compression for the calves making them comfortable, as well.

If you find yourself troubled by problematic foot odor, Latigo is producing socks with a new aromatherapy fabric called Fusion Flow. Fusion Flow consists of microscopic fragrance capsules embedded into fabric to provide long-lasting freshness. Currently, you can buy it in the form of the Peppermint Paddie knee-high boot sock. Aside from smelling great, the sock is also designed with a padded heel for stirrup support and offers compression for the calves, making them comfortable, as well.

## What's Next?

One of the great things about innovation is that it builds a bridge to even more interesting and insightful uses of fabrics and technologies. As equestrian clothing manufacturers and businesses continue to push the envelope and explore new uses for fabrics and new fabrics themselves, we all will be the beneficiaries.

