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How Prince Charles set fire to a pile of jumpers and buried others in a flowerbed to show why we should wear more woollen clothes



Prince Charles at Clarence House with models wearing garments made from wool, as part of his Campaign for Wool

He is well known for his passion for plants, but this may be the strangest crop the Prince of Wales has yet tried to raise.

The Prince has disclosed how, in a curious experiment to establish the comparative qualities of wool and synthetic fibre, he buried two jumpers in a flower bed at Clarence House.

His aim was to illustrate wool's virtues as a material that is not only endlessly versatile but also eminently recyclable and totally biodegradable.



To demonstrate the biodegradability of wool, the Prince of Wales buries two sweaters, one made from wool and another made from a synthetic fibre

Writing in the Telegraph Magazine the Prince recalled how “six months later, a ceremonious exhumation revealed an intact synthetic jersey, fit indeed to be washed and worn, while the woollen jersey had quietly and usefully biodegraded itself away to nothing”.

Not content with that, the Prince set fire to a pile of jumpers, one synthetic, the other woollen, to test their fire retardant qualities.



A wool duvet, a wool jacket and wool carpet were given a flammability test, along with their synthetic counterparts

“Synthetic jerseys produced a dramatic and disconcerting blaze,” he concluded. “While their woollen counterparts merely smouldered in relative safety.”

There may be something of the mad scientist in all this, recalling his famous habit of talking to his plants, but the experiments are in line with his wider thinking on the environment.



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The Prince has long been credited with popularising the use of organic produce. Since then he has turned his attention to the wonders of wool.

Next week he will host the Dumfries House Conference, in Scotland, bringing together what he calls “a great gathering of wool people”, including spinners, weavers and designers such as Paul Smith and Ermenegildo Zegna, along with carpet makers, sheep farmers, retailers and mill owners.

As the Prince points out the price of wool has fallen sharply in recent years, with some sheep farmers receiving less for their wool than the cost of shearing their sheep as manufacturers turned to synthetic materials.

“I want to encourage a much greater understanding of wool”

Prince Charles



Prince Charles shows a sheep to pupils from Avening Primary School in Gloucestershire at Highgrove

In response he helped launch the Campaign for Wool in 2010. Since its launch the campaign has staged more than 200 events, including shepherds grazing sheep on grass laid along Savile Row in London, the heartland of British tailoring, and in New York’s Bryant Park. Fashion shows in Japan, Italy and China have all featured woollen garments.

The Prince says there are now signs of a revival, with the fall in sheep numbers across the globe slowing down.



The Prince of Wales observes sheep being led into a shearing shed in Australia in 2012



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“I want to encourage a much greater understanding of wool not only as a global environmental resource – versatile, sustainable, renewable and natural – but also as a global fashion resource of the highest quality,” he writes.

He adds pointedly: “These may not be entirely welcome propositions in some part of an industry that is sadly dominated by mass-produced chemical fibres, but today’s environmentally aware consumers do seem to be seeking out quality and durability in fashion, lifestyle and interiors. And that is exactly what wool provides.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/02/how-prince-charles-set-fire-to-a-pile-of-jumpers-and-buried-othe/>