

How Silk Is Used

During the Edo period (1603–1867), textiles were measured according to the amount of fabric it took to make the basic *kosode* (“small sleeve”) kimono. The amount required to create one *kosode* was known as one *tan*, a bolt of fabric 36 centimeters wide by 11.4 meters long.

To create one *tan* of silk requires 650 grams of refined silk, which in turn takes 900 grams of raw silk to produce. This amount of raw silk yarn requires 4,900 grams of cocoons, or about 2,600 individual cocoons. Each cocoon is actually a tightly wound single strand of silk between 1,300 to 1,500 meters in length. Three to five strands are reeled together to make a single raw silk thread.

Today silk is of course used to create clothing, but it is also used to make cosmetics, shamisen strings, and *nihonga* (Japanese paintings). It is also important in the medical field, where it is used to create things like sutures and artificial veins.