

## So which tartan should I wear?

Short answer: Whichever strikes your fancy.

A MacLeod interested in purchasing a kilt, or any other tartan garment, is faced with a bewildering array of choices. Although the primary choices are MacLeod of Harris (*aka* Hunting MacLeod) and MacLeod of Lewis (*aka* Dress MacLeod), there are other choices based on cadet families (MacLeod of Raasay, Skye, Assynt or Gesto), regions (German MacLeod, Californian MacLeod, CMS Scotland), or variations based on any number of other things. See the tartan section of the CMSUSA website ([https://clanmacleodusa.org/Tartans\\_\\_Crests.html](https://clanmacleodusa.org/Tartans__Crests.html)).

Although there are those who would insist that one has a “right” to wear a certain tartan and no right to wear others, this position is not historically supported. Most of the older tartans were named arbitrarily by woolen merchants far from the highlands in Edinburgh or Glasgow, or in the case of the MacLeod of Lewis and many other standards in current tartan guides, from the forged *Vestarium Scoticum*. Newer ones have been designed as variations on themes suggested by older ones, to suit evolving tastes, or to broaden the palette of colors available.

Neither Leod nor any of his descendants for more than a dozen generations would recognize any of the currently available tartans as “MacLeod.” They would find the concept perplexing. The whole notion of a “clan” tartan is no more than two hundred years old. Simply put, Sir Walter Scott and his buddies thought clan tartans would be a cool idea.

And they are a cool idea.

Whatever the history, tartan has become a central part of the Scottish identity, and the current custom is to associate a tartan design with a clan or other organization. It makes a clansman instantly recognizable, it gives duffers at highland games something to argue about, it gives the Scottish woolen industry a great marketing gimmick and publishers a subject to address in identification guides.

Chose a pattern, or sett, you like. When asked why a particular sett was chosen, “I liked it” is every bit as valid a reason as “My name is MacLeod” or “My granny was a MacLeod.” If questioned on your “right” to wear it, unless the questioner can demonstrate that the tartan you chose is copyrighted, patented or registered as a trademark, your response can be based on how pugnacious you feel at the time.

### References:

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Sutton, Ann and Richard Carr. *Tartans, Their Art and History*. Arco Publishing, New York, 1984.