

The invention concerns biodegradable polymers made from a) monoethylenically unsaturated dicarboxylic acids and/or their salts; b) monoethylenically unsaturated monocarboxylic acids and/or their salts; c) singly unsaturated monomers which, following hydrolysis, can be converted to monomers with a hydroxyl group covalently bonded to the carbon chain and, optionally, d) other monomers which can be copolymerized by a radical mechanism, the sum of monomers a) to d) being 100 % by wt. The invention also concerns a method of producing these polymers by radical-initiated polymerization and hydrolysis in an aqueous medium, plus the use of these polymers as additives or cobuilders in washing and cleaning agents, in the treatment of cotton, as bleach stabilizers, as auxiliaries in the printing of textiles and in the production of leather, as well as in the inhibition of the effects of water hardness and as a dispersant.