



Maintaining the Home

Buying New Carpet

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Consider the space to be covered when selecting new carpet. Although wall-to-wall carpet is attractive, it soils first in heavy traffic paths making the whole area look worn. Decorative room-size rugs or carpets measured and bound to fit a room can be turned to distribute wear and/or sent out for cleaning. Room-size rugs and carpets also work well for basements that may get wet because they can be moved to a dry space before flooding occurs.

Read the care recommendations and warranty provisions. Some care processes may invalidate the warranty. The following are some additional tips to consider when selecting new carpet.

Color

- A neutral carpet color can bring unity throughout the house. Smaller area rugs in designated high-traffic areas or in conversation areas can serve design purposes and hide soil or stains.
- Tweed, multi-colored, patterned or textured carpet shows soil less than smoother appearing plush carpet.
- As a carpet is made, color can be added at different stages—in the fiber before spinning, in the yarn state or after the carpet is tufted or woven. Solution-dyed carpet fibers have the dye locked inside at the time the fiber is made. This type of carpet is more resistant to cleaning chemicals than carpets colored by other methods. If the label doesn't mention that the fiber is solution-dyed, it probably is not.
- Some printed carpets and rugs (e.g. oriental-style) are colored after the carpet is tufted or woven. Close examination at the base of the pile may show the depth of dye penetration. These carpets and rugs often are less expensive than those colored by other methods. However, they may be less colorfast to atmospheric conditions and cleaning materials.

Face-fiber

- Carpet advertising often emphasizes the face-fiber content, such as nylon, polyester, olefin, acrylic, wool or cotton. Carpet dealers talk about carpet weight, which means the amount of face-fiber measured in ounces per square yard. Carpet durability is related not only to fiber content and weight, but also to the carpet structure.
- Nylon represents about 60 percent of face-fiber used in carpets annually. Other fibers used include olefin (33 percent), polyester (7 percent) and wool (0.4 percent).
- Nylon face-fibers are strong, resilient and naturally water resistant. Water stains are easily cleaned with an absorbent cloth or paper towel. Sponging with a water-dampened cloth is usually enough to remove a stain. Nylon may have finishes to reduce static electricity or a fluorocarbon added to improve soil resistance. Other finishes added during installation may not be beneficial due to nylon's natural resistance to water-borne stains.
- Olefin fibers often are used in indoor-outdoor

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carpeting because of their resilience, abrasion and water resistance. However, they have poor oil and heat resistance (hot bacon fat could melt fibers).

- Polyester carpet fibers are durable, but somewhat less resilient than nylon carpet fibers.
- Acrylics imitate wools in appearance and are less expensive, but crush more easily than wool, which is very resilient. Wool, however, causes allergy problems for some people.

Pile

- Carpet pile or height refers to the length of the carpet yarn from the base of the primary backing to the carpet surface. Pile density refers to how close together the tufting stitches are. Bend a carpet sample in half and you can see both height and density more clearly. Carpet yarns are expected to bloom out to cover more surface area than they take up in the stitch underneath. When stitches of tufting are close together, the yarns support each other, improving the long-term appearance, resilience and durability of the carpet.
- Most commercial grade carpeting has short, dense, looped pile. It feels less bouncy and soft underfoot and shows footfalls less than carpeting with cut pile of greater height, which is often used in homes. Berber carpets have looped pile with thick yarns that look like handmade wool, but actually may be made from nylon, olefin or a blend of fibers.
- Carpet appearance is affected by the texture or style of pile: level loop—multi-level loop, velvet or plush cut or tip sheared (with the top part of the loops cut off). Shag carpeting has longer pile with tufts widely spaced. Saxony and frieze carpets have yarns with more twist. The latter is twisted so much the yarns don't stand straight. These yarns should be heat-set to maintain their twist.
- Nearly all carpeting is tufted by forming loops

through a primary backing, often woven of polypropylene and referred to as a moisture barrier. An adhesive—usually latex foam—seals face yarns in place and a secondary backing provides dimensional stability. The latter may be constructed of polypropylene, jute or polyurethane foam.

Special finishes

- Special treatments may be given to carpet fibers to enhance stain removal. Trademark examples are Honeywell Worry Free, BASF Scotchgard Stain Release, Dupont Stainmaster and Solutia Pet-Agree. Use of trademarks change as companies merge and ownership changes. Check Web sites or current literature for the accurate trademark.

Cost and installation

- To determine how much you will pay for wall-to-wall carpeting, be sure to include the cost of the amount of carpet needed, as well as the cost for padding and installation.
- An inexpensive pad may serve you as well as an expensive one. For example, polyurethane pads can last at least 10 years under nylon carpeting unless subjected to severe wear and abuse.
- Most carpet retailers will measure your home and provide estimates free of charge.

The yardage often exceeds the amount of square yards to be covered in your home because most carpet is made in 12-foot widths that may not fit your room size. Also, the direction of nap or pile must be matched for a good appearance. The retailers or designers who estimate the amount of carpet needed to cover your floors take into account the extra amount needed to match pattern design and pile direction. Be sure their layout plan is clearly understood by your installer. Otherwise, you may have carpet seams in heavy traffic areas. Having seams in highly visible places is undesirable because carpets tend to shrink when cleaned and seams will show more.

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Mention of specific product names is for educational purposes only and does not constitute a positive or negative endorsement.

This material was adapted from publications produced by Iowa State University. Iowa Cooperative Extension publications can be found on the Web at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/>.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

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