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Selecting Rugs and Carpets

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Carpets and rugs help to make a home attractive, cozy, and livable in any or all rooms including the kitchen and bathroom. It is important to select carpeting which will give you the most satisfaction and which is best suited for your particular needs and situation. Is traffic heavy or light in the room? Is this a temporary or permanent location? Will the carpet be expected to give the longest possible service, or will it be discarded for a newer type or color after a comparatively short time? Value is determined by what you get from your carpeting in the way of service, durability, comfort, and improvement in the appearance of the room. When selecting carpeting, buy the best quality you can afford.

TYPES OF CARPETING

Rugs are soft floor coverings laid on the floor but not fastened to it. A carpet covers the entire floor and is fastened down. Carpeting purchased by the yard may be cut to room size and used as a rug or laid wall to wall and fastened down. Carpeting and rugs woven in usual room sizes come in several types and qualities and are very similar in every way except size. This discussion applies to rugs as well as carpeting.

Rugs and carpeting were formerly sold on the basis of construction. Today, with so many types of fibers, more emphasis is placed on fiber content. Until a few years ago most carpeting was woven on machines where the surface pile and backing were worked simultaneously. These carpets include Wilton, Axminster, and velvet rugs.

The major portion of all carpeting now is made by a process called tufting in which pile yarns are punched into a broad canvas by wide multi-needled machines. The yarns are held in place by a layer of latex on the back of the carpeting. Tufted rugs may be 9, 12, or 15 feet in width. The first were solid colors, but now it is possible to obtain stripes, squares, random ripple and other patterns.

Closely related to tufted carpets is knitted carpeting which is made in one operation. The backing yarn, stitching yarn, and pile yarn are looped together with three sets of needles. The succession of loops may be seen on the back side of the carpet. The knitted structure is usually made with uncut loops and may be one-level and multi-level.

Broadloom is a seamless carpeting of any weave or structure up to 18 (or more) feet wide. It is popular because there are no seams to break the attractive pile surface.

WEARING QUALITY OR DURABILITY

Wearing quality or durability in a soft floor covering is based on 1) type of fiber used, 2) construction of yarns, 3) closeness of weave, 4) pile, and 5) construction of the backing.

Type of fiber

Wool has been the traditional fiber in good quality rugs, but many new man-made fibers now are being used in carpets. Carpeting varies in quality as well as price. Select the type of fiber which most nearly satisfies your specific requirements.

Wool is traditional fiber and is considered good because of its beauty and superior ability to spring back after crushing. Carpet yarns are made of coarse, wiry, tough fleeces from low-grade wool imported from other countries. Wool produced in this country is too fine and too soft for use in carpeting.

Cotton is a soft fiber that has a tendency to crush and does not stand up under heavy wear. It is inexpensive, however, and most often is used in small-sized rugs which can be washed. Cotton soils readily unless treated for soil resistance.

Figure 1. Cross section of new carpets; A—wool twist; B—wool loop; C—acrylic loop; and D—nylon two-level loop.
Rayon is not resilient. It takes dyes well and produces rich colors, but it is not as resistant to abrasion as other man-made fibers.

Nylon fibers are well known for durability. They often are blended with other fibers. They absorb little moisture and dry fast, but do not have the resiliency of wool.

Acrylic fibers are soft, silky and warm, and give the appearance of wool; they clean easily and dry rapidly.

Modacrylic fibers are similar to wool and have good resistance to abrasion and soiling; crush recovery is good.

Polypropylene has good abrasion resistance and is resilient and easy to clean. It is possible to achieve a denser pile with polypropylene fibers.

Construction of Yarn
Yarns need to be strong, bulky, springy and need to form a durable crush-resistant pile. They may be single, 2, 3, or 4 ply. Two ply yarns of different colors may be twisted around each other to give a pebbled effect.

Closeness of Weave
The more tufts or loops per square inch the more durability and resiliency in the carpeting. Bend the carpet on the right side and look at how close the rows of tufts are placed. If there is a wide space between the tufts so that white lines show, the rug may not be of good quality and will not wear well.

Pile
Depth of pile depends on the type of weave and the kind of fibers used. Good rugs are made with both short and high pile. Densely woven or tufted pile in rayon and cotton prevents matting. A higher pile in other fibers gives a more luxurious feeling and is durable.

The amount of fiber on the face of the carpet is important for the wear life. Dense or closely packed pile yarns support each other. If tufts are spaced far apart on high-pile carpets, the pile will flatten and show footprints quicker than on low pile. It takes longer to wear pile down from the tip than from the side.

Backing Construction
Backing is the foundation for the carpets and holds the pile yarns in place. Backing fibers may be cotton, jute, linen, or craftcord. Tufted carpeting must have a latex rubber on the back to prevent yarns from being pulled out of position. Some carpets have a burlap cover attached to the backing; others have a foam layer bonded to the back. These give some resiliency.

RESEARCH STUDY
Most consumers want carpeting to give maximum service; however, appearance during the wear period is important. A carpet may be attractive and resilient when new but after a short time may not be acceptable because of color change, yarn distortion, or loss of texture.

For this reason workers at the South Dakota and Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Stations have been carrying on a research study to obtain information which might be helpful for homemakers in making the best and most economical selection of carpeting.

Procedure
Four pieces of carpeting were used—two wool, one nylon, and one acrylic. The carpets differed in structure; two were uncut loop; one was multi-level loop; one was twist. They were moderate in price and identical in cost per square yard.
The main corridor of the Administration Building at South Dakota State University was selected as the location for the two-year carpet wear study. Traffic in this area is very heavy and would be equivalent to many years of home wear.

The carpets were vacuumed daily, and were given a thorough cleaning every three months. Two methods of cleaning were used. One-half of the carpeting was cleaned with a sawdust base cleaner which was sprinkled on and worked in with a brush. The other half was mechanically shampooed with a water base shampoo. Carpets were allowed to dry overnight, then vacuum cleaned thoroughly before use.

**Results**

After the two-year period a panel of judges compared appearance of worn and cleaned carpet pieces with new carpeting. All carpets appeared grayed after two years of wear and of cleaning with the dry method. Commercial cleaning helped to remove some grayness on a portion of the worn carpet.

Carpets areas cleaned by the wet shampoo method produced acceptable results for acrylic and wool loop carpets but not for nylon and wool twist. Commercial cleaning improved appearance of all except wool twist.

Texture characteristics were somewhat altered by wear, although commercial cleaning helped to overcome this in some cases. Loop structures—wool and acrylic—were acceptable after both methods of home cleaning, as well as commercial cleaning. Loops were not seriously distorted and remained upright. Some flattening of wool loop yarns appeared after wet cleaning but was restored by commercial cleaning. Some packing of acrylic pile was noted in the traffic lanes.

| 1 — Nylon two-level loop carpeting |
| 2 — Acrylic loop carpeting         |
| 3 — Wool twist carpeting          |
| 4 — Wool loop carpeting           |

| A — New carpeting                  |
| B — Home wet method                |
| C — Wet plus commercial cleaning   |
| D — Home dry method                |
| E — Dry plus commercial cleaning   |

Nylon pile remained standing, but after cleaning the tufts spread apart presenting an over-all matted appearance. The matted nylon was rated acceptable only after commercial cleaning.

The wool twist appeared worn because some tufts lay flat on the surface and more tightly twisted, while others opened and spread with cleaning and wear.

Nylon tufts were slightly shortened after final cleaning. This may have contributed to the matted appearance.

The nylon carpet had the greatest thickness originally and maintained it to a better degree than any of the other carpets. The wool loop was thicker than the wool twist, and less of its original thickness was lost through wear and cleaning than the acrylic loop and wool twist.

The nylon carpeting had a burlap covering bonded to the backing. After wear and cleaning the burlap separated from the backing in some areas. This may have contributed to stretching and buckling of this piece of carpeting.

As the study progressed it was observed that the chemical fiber carpets appeared soiled before the

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wool carpets. And, although the chemical fibers cleaned easily, they resoiled rapidly. After heavy traffic and soiling, vacuum cleaning produced a cleaner appearance on wool than on synthetic fibers.

Pile of one-level carpet was easier to clean than of two-level or high-low carpets.

**BUYING TIPS**

1. Buy your carpet from a reliable dealer.
2. Look for close, compact pile. More yarns mean more wear.
3. If the room gets hard use, select a fiber that springs back and does not mat down.
4. A figured or patterned rug or carpet will not show soil as readily as a plain floor covering.
5. Choose the best quality your budget will allow. Sometimes it pays in the long run to wait until you can afford to buy a better quality rug.
6. Don't buy a color just because it's "in style." Get a color that you can live with and that harmonizes with your furnishings.
7. Don't buy on the spur of the moment. Take your time; read the advertisements; compare samples and prices. If a well-known firm advertises a sale, you will know whether the merchandise is a good buy.

**FIGURING YARDAGE AND COST**

1. Measure the length and width of the room in feet. If the room is irregular in shape, divide into rectangles, measure each rectangle, and add the results.
2. Multiply length by width to give the number of square feet. If there are two or more rectangles, add the square feet.
3. Divide total square feet by 9 to obtain square yards. (Carpeting is usually sold by the square yard.)
4. Multiply square yards by the cost per yard of carpeting. The cost of the rug cushion is determined by multiplying the cost per square yard of cushion by total yards of carpeting. The cushion should come about 1¼ inches inside the rug edge of wall to wall carpeting, however. For rugs the cushion should be from 1½ to 3 inches inside the rug edges.