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## G97-1317 Rug Selection and Use

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## Rug Selection and Use

Rug types and styles, as well as cost and consumer considerations, are covered here.

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*Adapted by Shirley M. Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Environment of Home/Housing*

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Unlike carpeting, which is a wall-to-wall, permanent installation, rugs can be relocated.

### Rug Types

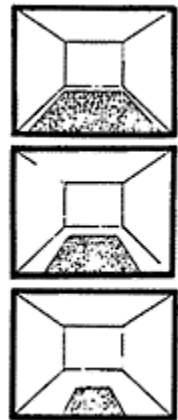
Rugs come in three main types. Each has a specific purpose. Some common sizes are suggested, but the size of the rug in relation to the size of the space (room) and the way the rug is used are more apt to determine the rug type.

**Room-size rugs** or **room-fit rugs** are available in prefinished, standard sizes such as 9 feet  $\times$  12 feet, 12 feet  $\times$  15 feet, or cut to a desired size from a roll of carpet and finished on the cut edges. A **room-fit rug** covers the entire floor, just like carpeting, but is not permanently fastened down. Three to 12 inches of floor usually are exposed between the wall and outer edges of a **room-size rug**. Up to 18 inches of floor can be exposed around the periphery of large rooms.

Selecting a rug that is too small produces an unattractive space. The rug looks lost and the furnishings in the room do not appear unified. The less exposed the floor is around the edge of the room, the larger the room looks.

**Area** or **accent rugs** comprise a rather unstructured group of rugs from 3 feet  $\times$  5 feet up to 12 feet  $\times$  15 feet or larger. Area or accent rugs can be used effectively to divide spaces within an area, focus attention on a furniture grouping, direct traffic, or provide a focal point (visual accent or interest area) for some portion of the room through their texture, pattern or shape. These rugs may be used on the floor, on the wall or on top of a piece of furniture. Several area or accent rugs might be used within a space, but be careful not to produce a cluttered appearance.

**Throw** or **scatter rugs** are small, often machine washable, 3 feet  $\times$  5 feet or less in size. These rugs should have non-skid backings if they will be used on top of wood, hard<sup>1</sup> or resilient<sup>2</sup> floors. Non-skid backings are not necessary, however, if the rugs will be used on top of carpeting or a larger rug.



## Consumer Considerations

Because a rug can perform so many functions, consumer selection often is based less on quality and more on texture, color, pattern and shape. Fiber content, construction techniques and texture are about the same as for carpeting.<sup>3</sup>

**Weaving** -- Many rugs are woven, some by hand, but a larger percentage by machine.

Technological modifications of looms make machine-made rugs appear similar to some of the finest handmade rugs. Technology also enables the producer to do much more with color, texture, pattern and size, using traditional velvet, Wilton and Axminster rug weaves.

These three traditional rug weaves today closely resemble tufted carpets or rugs in surface design and texture. The woven rug generally does not have a jute backing attached, so you can see the woven structure of the carpet backing.

The subject of rug and carpet weaving is vast. As with other carpet construction, serviceability depends on density, fiber content and intended use.

**Texture** -- A rough or bulky-textured rug can be used on top of a flat-weave or smooth-textured rug or carpet, but sometimes the top rug can move, creating an unsafe condition and considerable wear to the surface of the lower floor covering. When using a rug on top of carpet, carefully consider surface textures. Textures can be identical when combining a solid color and a pattern. Two solid colors, one on top of the other, require different textures for the most effective result.

**Color** -- Color varies with each individual and each style. The following points about color<sup>4</sup> should be considered:

- light colors make spaces appear larger; dark designs and patterns show up best on light backgrounds;
- light designs and patterns show up best on dark backgrounds;
- to emphasize a particular segment of a pattern or design, use the color of that segment as the background color; lighting alters color, so be sure to examine colors under all light sources (daylight and artificial light);
- colors and patterns may limit other design development in a space, so select carefully;
- pattern and color blends do not show soiling and footprints as much as solid colors do;
- neutral colors show the least fading when exposed to sunlight. Solution-dyed synthetic fibers or vat-dyed natural fibers resist fading.

**Soiling** -- Color and design influence, to a degree, how rapidly the rug will show soiling. Research shows that soiling appears most readily on white or light yellow floor coverings. Dark colors show lint and accumulated dust, while medium colors, color blends and patterns are best for hiding soiling.

If a rug is being used primarily to reduce soiling on another floor surface, be sure the rug selected will tolerate the cleanings required.

**Pattern use** -- A rug pattern may be simple or very complex. Several patterned rugs can be used in a space very effectively. Be careful, though, to plan this type of arrangement so each rug maintains its identity and beauty, and the space does not look cluttered. The best way to achieve this is to experiment with different combinations. Combine various pieces on the floor of a retail

store or assemble colored pictures of various pieces.

**Padding --** Theories vary on the use of padding with rugs. Research shows that all rugs and carpets last longer with a pad under them. A pad for a rug should be approximately one inch less in length and width than the rug size so no pad shows. Flat weaves should have flat pads (1/4 inch or 40-ounce-weight) rather than bulky pads.

**Labeling --** Rugs must be labeled as to fiber content. If the rug is cut from a roll of carpeting, the label information will have to be copied from the sample for future reference. Any fiber content of five percent or more must be identified generically. Fiber content of less than five percent is listed as "other fiber." Approximately 20-30 percent or more of a fiber must be in a blend for the fiber's characteristics to be effective. The name of the manufacturer and the country of origin also must be listed.

The Flammable Fabrics Act requires that carpets and large rugs (over 4 feet × 6 feet) meet government flammability standards. Rugs 4 feet × 6 feet and smaller that fail to meet these standards can be sold but must clearly be labeled, "***Flammable: Should Not Be Used Near Sources of Ignition or Flammable Furnishings.***"

The flammability standards do not mean the carpet will not burn. Rather, they mean the carpet is constructed so flame spread and smoke emission do not exceed established ratings. The carpet or rug will not produce a flash fire and should self-extinguish if a burning match, hot coal or cigarette is dropped on it.

Labels may contain additional information: fabric finishes; dyes; resistance to moisture, mildew; static, insects; cleanability; warranty of manufacturer; pile density; fiber type(s); and type of traffic for which the rug was constructed.

## Cost

Rugs range in price from about \$5 up to \$5,000 or more, depending on size, construction, style and quality. Original, handmade rugs of good quality are the highest-priced. If well cared for, handmade rugs increase in value over the years.

If debating between a rug and carpeting on the premise the rug will cost less, compare the square yard prices of each before deciding.

As with other floor covering, purchase the best quality you can afford, keeping in mind its purpose, the length of time you expect it to last and the space in which it will be used. Select a rug you like, a rug you will enjoy, one that works well with your furnishings and is easy to care for and safe to use. Remember these selection factors:

size	shape	color
labeling	cost	style
pattern/design	fiber	intended use
traffic type	construction	texture
soiling	padding	safety

Much more can be learned about some of the rug styles and constructions by referring to books written

about the specific topics.

## Rug Styles

Rugs have been constructed for centuries. Many rug styles are the result of folk arts and traditions of various cultures. Other styles are the result of design and color influences of certain time periods. Although many of these styles originally were handmade, all are available in less costly, machine-made versions today. Some machine-made reproductions are excellent. Others should be avoided. Knowing a little about the original styles helps identify good quality machine-made reproductions.



Berber



Kilim



Kilim



Dhurrie



Oriental

**Berbers** -- This name now refers to both style and texture. Originally, Berber rugs were a mottled, natural-colored (often cream, ecru or white), bulky floor covering made by the nomadic Berber tribes of Northern Africa. Yarns in the original Berbers were coarse, slubbed and rugged.

**Braided rugs** -- Braided rugs are constructed of wool fabric, heavy wool rug yarn or other material selected by the designer. They may be square, round, rectangular or oval. Several individual lengths of braid or a continuous braid may be stitched or laced together into the desired shape. Combining traditional shapes or creating a free-form shape produces a more contemporary braided design. Braids range from three to seven or more strands. The flatter the braid, the more quickly the rug wears out. Braids of the same weight and width wear the most evenly.

**Hooked rugs** -- Hooked rugs are constructed on a strong, loosely woven backing fabric that is easy to hook through. Hooked rugs may be yarn, fabric, leather or other material selected by the designer. Any design or shape can be created with a hooked rug. A variety of hook styles and hooking techniques is used, but the results are similar. The pile surface of a hooked rug may be cut, uncut or a mix of both.

**Ryas** -- A Rya rug is a welt-faced, pile-surfaced, hand-knotted rug of Scandinavian origin.

It traditionally was made on a loom using a row of Ghiordes knots and a row of plain weave or variations thereof. Ryas also can be made using a hooking process or a needle-weaving process. The earliest Ryas had widely spaced knots, often on both the front and back of the rug. More recent Ryas have more closely set knots. When the pile surface is cut rather than looped, the rug is called a Flossa rather than a Rya.

**Kilims** -- Originally small, these slit-weave tapestry wool rugs have become larger and quite popular in the United States since the 1950s. Kilim rugs are an ancient style (oldest surviving example dates to the fifth century B.C.) characterized by long, narrow slits in the fabric that are arranged in a stairstep pattern to avoid weakening the rug. A variation of this construction uses a diagonal slit.

Kilims usually are reversible. They are made in bold colors and a variety of designs typical of the regions where they were woven.

Kilims have been found in Peru as well as northern Africa, Scandinavia and Iran. They are considered a universal style. Typical design motifs include geometric designs, and stylized figures of people, animals and flowers.

**Dhurries** -- The cotton cousin of the wool kilim, dhurries originally were made in India, Tibet, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Romania. Design motifs are similar to those used in kilims, but the colors are light, pale and soft. Dhurries have been made of wool since the early 1970s, and some silk dhurries were added in the late 1970s.

**Navaho rugs** -- Authentic Navaho rugs still can be obtained, but numerous imitations are on the market. A true Navaho rug is made of wool in a tapestry weave. Some twill weaves and basket weaves also are common. As with Orientals, Navaho rug patterns are named for the locality or family from which they originated. Although weaving was part of the Navaho culture at least as early as 1700, rugs were not made until after 1868.

**Oriental rugs** -- Oriental rugs or Oriental design rugs combine well with either traditional or contemporary furnishings. Oriental design rugs are machine-made reproductions of hand-knotted Orientals.

A modified Jacquard loom constructs an Oriental design rug so the design shows on both the back of the rug and the surface. This technique makes them look the same as hand-knotted Orientals.

Authentic Orientals are all hand-knotted of wool or silk and are costly. Some reproductions are woven, some are tufted, some are wool, some made of synthetic yarns. Some Oriental reproductions are costly.

Oriental rug designs have come from countless localities: Morocco, China, northern Africa and southern Russia. The pattern and colors used in any Oriental rug design are based on the original tribe, town or province. In reproductions some manufacturers maintain original designs and colors, while others select colors of their own liking and create their own design interpretation.

Oriental rug quality is judged by the type of knot used, pile depth, closeness of weave (number of knots per square inch), the fineness of the yarn, richness of the color, fastness of the dye and subtleness of the pattern. For an idea of the difference between an original Oriental rug and an Oriental reproduction, an ancient Persian carpet displayed at the New York Metropolitan Museum

of Art is said to have 2,500 knots per square inch. The finest machine-made reproductions today have approximately 68 tufts per square inch—one tuft being equivalent to one knot.

**Aubussons and Savonneries** -- These two French rug styles, though similar in design and color, differ in construction and texture. The flat-woven Aubusson is a heavy, coarse, tightly woven tapestry rug. The Savonnerie is a fine, soft, Ghiordes-knotted pile rug. Motifs in the Savonnerie rugs often are carved, making the motif stand out in relief. New and old Savonneries are available today. Both of these rug styles feature a center medallion and peripheral border.

**Grass floor covering** -- Grass floor coverings, also known as "matting," are made of natural vegetable fibers: sisal, coir, hemp, rush and maize. The rough texture may delight the eye, but most matting has the feel of sandpaper. Rush mats are the smoothest. If purchasing a very roughly textured grass floor cover, some protection for nylon hose or babies' knees is advised.

Vegetable fiber rugs are incredibly durable. Sisal and coir are two of the strongest fibers in the world. Fiber mats work well as a means of soundproofing, and sisal is naturally fire-resistant and static-free. However, any vegetable fiber can mildew. Because of their natural coloring, fiber mats work well under area rugs such as Orientals, Rya's or Navahos.

Grass rugs may be woven or plaited. Often plaited varieties are made of small rectangles, squares, circles, or ovals that are sewn together. Grass tiles, about 20 inches square, also are available.

Grass floor coverings may be padded or laid flat on the floor. If the pad is permanently attached, the cost is about twice that of a non-padded grass rug.

Grass fiber rugs can be cleaned with a mild detergent solution.

Other Floor Covering NebGuides:

- *HEG88-231, Carpet Selection: General*
- *G94-1222, Rug and Carpet Fibers: Selection and Care*
- *G97-1316, Carpet Selection: Construction and Texture*

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<sup>1</sup>Hard floors include stone, marble, concrete, brick and ceramic tile.

<sup>2</sup>Resilient floors are made of cork, vinyl, cushioned vinyl, vinyl compositions and rubber. Sometimes wood is included in this category, but its different structure and care usually place it in a separate category.

<sup>3</sup>See *G94-1222, Rug and Carpet Fibers: Selection and Care*.

<sup>4</sup>See *HEG88-231, Carpet Selection, General*

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## ***File G1317 under: HOME FURNISHINGS***

### ***B-8, Floor Coverings***

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