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EC63-1172 Guide for Buying...Sheets

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GUIDE for BUYING

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SHEETS

by Magdelene Pfister
Extension Specialist in Home Furnishings

Muslin or percale? White or colored? Flat or fitted?

What should you consider when buying sheets and pillow cases? Here are some guides to fabric types, styles, sizes and finishes to help you decide which will best suit your needs.

WHAT FABRIC ?

Most bed linens are of cotton. The type of sheet is described in terms of thread count, which is the total number of warp yarns plus the number of filling yarns per square inch. Usually the higher the thread count, the better the sheet. Finished thread count refers to number of yarns per square inch after finishing.

Muslin is woven of short, staple, carded yarns, while percale is woven of longer carded or combed yarns which produce a finer, silkier sheet. Pima, an extra long staple cotton, produces a luxurious-feeling, excellent quality sheet. Although lighter in weight than regular percale, pima has greater tensile strength.

Most sheets available are of one of these types:

Type 128 muslin -- a sturdy, popular priced sheet of medium weight.

Type 140 muslin -- heavy weight sheet used by institutions and some homes.

Type 180 percale -- lightweight, soft, smooth, easy and economical to launder. May be carded or combed yarns.

Type 200 percale -- most luxurious and expensive. Made of finest combed yarns, light, soft textured.

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WHICH TO CHOOSE?

Muslin is not necessarily longer wearing than percale. Weight and tensile strength are not the only factors determining durability. A coarse wire such as a paper clip may seem sturdy, yet with bending will break because of lack of flexibility and resiliency. So it is with yarns.

A sheet's hardest wear results from fitting tightly around a mattress and from pulling and agitating in laundering and use. Wear also may result from strong bleaches and detergents in laundering. Tests have proven that a well-made combed percale sheet, woven of fine quality long staple cotton, although lighter in weight wears longer than heavier muslin.

Sheets were tested for two years in a hospital in North Carolina under controlled conditions. At the end of that period, the heavy duty muslin had worn out long before the fine combed percale. A survey of motels and institutions showed that muslin sheets gave an average of 90 to 100 uses without mending as compared to 200 with percale.

So, from an economy standpoint as well as esthetic standpoint, you may find percale sheets your best buy. While they cost more initially, they may last longer and may be easier to launder.

First-quality sheets are made of evenly woven fabrics. Hems should be straight and neat. There are "seconds" on the market. These have flaws such as in weaving, bleaching or stitching. They are good buys if the flaws do not affect the wearing quality.

Run-of-the-mill sheets are those that have not been inspected and graded.

WHAT SIZE?

For comfort and wear, sheets and pillow cases must fit properly. Mattresses and pillows are made in many different sizes and there are correct sheet and pillow case sizes for most of them.

Flat sheet sizes are given as torn size; that is, the size before hemming.

To figure the correct length, allow four inches for hem and about 5 percent for shrinkage. For example, a sheet labeled 108 inches before hemming will be 103 inches when purchased and when laundered will be about 98 inches, with five inches lost in shrinkage. This size is adequate for most full mattresses. Extra length mattresses are growing in popularity and extra length sheets 120 - 122 1/2 inches torn size are made for them.

Fitted sheets are pre-shrunk and should carry a guarantee of less than 1 percent residual shrinkage. Here are suggested sheet sizes:

Bed	Mattress size	Sheet size
Cot or youth	33 x 66-76"	63 x 108"
Twin	39 x 76"	72 x 108"
Full or double	54 x 76"	81 x 108"
Queen	60 x 80"	100 x 120"
King	72 x 84"	108 x 122 1/2"

Pillow Case Sizes

A case that is too small makes a pillow uncomfortable and wears out sooner. A case that is too large makes the pillow appear untidy. To find the right width measure around the pillow and add two or three inches. A pillow case should be six inches longer than the pillow.

Pillow case sizes are given as torn size before seaming and hemming. Fiber filled or foam pillows are usually smaller than feather pillows, so require a smaller case than the standard 42" x 38 1/2" size. There are cases 42" x 48" for pillows used on wide beds.

WHAT FINISH?

Fitted sheets are Sanforized or preshrunk. Be sure that residual shrinkage does not exceed 1 percent.

A few sheets, particularly for crib beds, may be sanitized to make them germ free.

Sheets with "no iron" finish are not in great demand, perhaps because they cost more and many people do not iron sheets anyway. The finish used on some "no iron" fabrics will turn yellow when a chlorine bleach is used.

Sizing is starch or other substances added to give a smooth finish. Large amounts are sometimes used to give a coarsely woven sheet the appearance of a fine, close weave. To check, rub parts of a new sheet over a dark surface. No white powder should rub out.

WHAT STYLE?

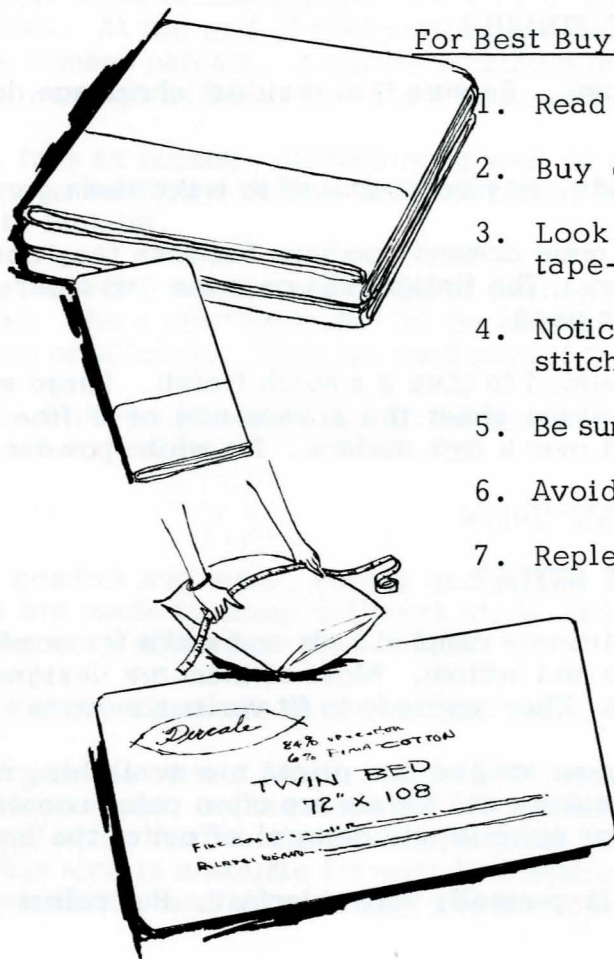
Fitted sheets save bedmaking time, eliminate rumpled beds and make for comfortable sleeping. They are available for both top and bottom. Most of them are designed with corners that are easy to put on and take off. They are made to fit various mattress types.

A wide selection of solid colors, woven stripes and prints are available, offering many decorating possibilities. Sheets, blankets and towels are often color coordinated. Chosen wisely, they can add to the color scheme and general effect of the bedroom.

When color is woven into the fabric it is generally very colorfast. But colors printed on sheeting may not be as colorfast.

HOW MANY?

Six sheets per bed and three cases per pillow are recommended. The supply should be replenished on a regular basis. Most stores have "white sales," -- a good time to make annual purchases. Sheets wear longer if they are changed often and rotated in use.



For Best Buy Remember:

1. Read the label to know what you are getting.
2. Buy correct size for your beds and pillows.
3. Look for closely woven, even surface and firm tape-like selvage.
4. Notice if hems are straight and stitched with fine stitches.
5. Be sure that corners of fitted sheets are reinforced.
6. Avoid excessive sizing.
7. Replenish bedding regularly.