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HEG88-231 Carpet Selection: General

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Carpet Selection: General

Carpet cost, installation and measuring are discussed here, along with labels and special considerations for carpet buyers.

Adapted by Shirley M. Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Interior Design/Home Furnishings

Carpet can be one of the largest furnishing expenses you have, so carefully examine the possibilities before making a purchasing decision. Considerations in purchasing carpet include cost, installation, measurements, labeling, color, traffic or activity level, acoustics and energy.

Cost

Extremely low-cost carpet should be avoided. Often that "unbelievable bargain" turns out to be a mill-end second and proves to be no bargain in the long run.

Good budget-priced carpeting usually lasts up to five years; medium to top-priced carpeting usually lasts 10 years or more. Carpets in the higher price ranges are usually better constructed, have denser face yarns (surface), and may have more colors, patterns and textures from which to choose.

In most instances you can find any carpet fiber in various price ranges, but examine the differences carefully; quality differs considerably. Make sure you determine the length of time you want the carpet to last.

HUD (Housing and Urban Development), a division of the Federal Housing Administration, uses the following formula to determine carpet pile density:

$$\frac{\text{pile yarn weight (oz./yd.)} \times 36}{\text{average pile height}} = \text{carpet pile density}$$

The higher the resultant number, the higher the carpet pile density. The denser the carpet, the more durable it will be. Select a density suitable for the traffic level where the carpet will be used.

Sometimes you can save at seasonal carpet sales, by purchasing remnants, shopping at discount houses or by purchasing do-it-yourself carpet. Select a reputable dealer who will stand behind the merchandise

you purchase.

Also, if you plan to install the carpet yourself, know your own skill and frustration levels. Installing a carpet is a large task involving a good deal of know-how. You may be dollars ahead to pay for a professional installer. Find out what guarantees (if any) the store and installer offer.

If cost is a major factor in your selection, compromise on size rather than quality. The actual carpet cost should include padding, installation and credit cost, if you purchase the carpet on credit. Installation costs usually are the same no matter what carpet quality you select.

Installation

Always look at a company's carpet installation performance before you hire them. Know they are going to do a satisfactory job for you. Talking to people for whom the installer has worked sometimes can help you. Observe whether pile or tufts go the same direction; if not, color changes will be evident.

While dealing with the salesperson, ask for the carpet leftovers. You may need them to make repairs later. If you are replacing an old carpet, ask if the installer takes up the old carpet and pad. If they do, what additional charge is involved? Will they use metal threshold strips to install the carpet, or some other method? Are these part of the cost or extra?

Carpet may be installed by stretching and securing it with "tackless strips" or by gluing it directly to the floor. Tackless strips are water-resistant plywood strips containing multiple rows of pins. The strips are installed around the periphery of the area to be carpeted, and nailed or glued to the floor. They can be applied to any kind of flooring. The carpet is stretched over the strips so the pins penetrate the carpet backing and hold it securely.

Gluing carpet down is especially good for heavy traffic areas. Even temperatures and humidity levels are essential if carpet is to be glued down. Severe environmental changes can cause buckling, stretching or shrinking. Floors must be level and dry.

It often is necessary to seam carpet but, once done, it is rarely noticeable. Seams should not be placed on heavy traffic ways or turning locations. They should be close to a wall or in areas where furniture will be placed. Seams may go *across* a doorway, but should not run *into* a doorway. Find out where seams are planned for your installation before closing a deal. You might want to purchase a little more carpet so seams are not going to cause problems.

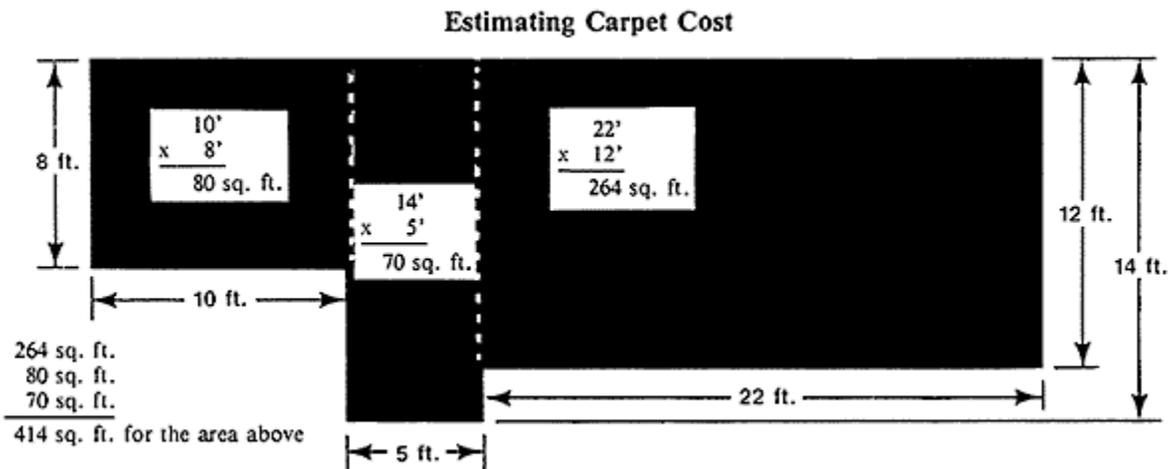
A good pad can extend the life of your carpet. Do not use an old carpet as padding for your new carpet. It will be worn in some areas more than in others and will not provide the support your new carpet needs.

Measuring

Generally, carpet comes in 9-foot, 12-foot and 15-foot widths. Rooms of the exact same width as the carpet may require a little extra width for easier installation. Smaller or larger rooms will need trimming or piecing. This may mean some loss or extra cost, depending on the space and shapes involved. Trimmings may be pieced for hallways or closets, but be sure tuft-pile run the same direction so color is the same throughout.

Measure the room or area you plan to carpet so you know the approximate quantity of carpet you need.

Include measurements for carpet extending into doorways. If the area is irregular, divide it into squares or rectangles and measure each area. Add the results to give you the total square footage. Below is an example of how this is done:



Your first figures will be square feet. Carpet, however, is sold by the square yards. Therefore, divide the first figure by 9 to get square yards. (414 square feet \div 9 = 46 square yards). Multiply carpet cost by the number of square yards to obtain the approximate cost. Padding is estimated the same way. Although you will need slightly less padding than carpet, for rough estimates use the same yardage for padding as you used for carpeting.

In some instances the price per square yard includes the padding and installation. In other cases those are additional costs. Stairs often cost slightly more than flat installations. Be sure to ask the salesperson.

The average residential stair has a tread 10 to 12 inches deep, a riser six to eight inches high, and is three to four feet wide. Different carpet is installed on stairs in different ways, so discuss this with the salesperson or installer. Sometimes allowing extra carpet on stairs lets you move the carpet down the stairs as wear occurs. With this in mind estimate maximum stairway needs, using three-fourths of a linear yard of carpet per stair.

Let the store from whom you are purchasing the carpet make final measurements. Then, if a mistake occurs, they, not you, are responsible and may rectify the error.

Labels

The wall-to-wall carpeting you put in your home will not be labeled, but the sample you use in selecting it will bear a label. It will tell you the name of the manufacturer or distributor, the generic names of the carpet fibers (and, perhaps, the company trade name), the percentage of each fiber and, if imported, the country of origin and a Federal Trade Commission registration number.

Be sure all label information is written on the invoice and on any sales contract. The label information helps provide care information for the carpeting and also may prove helpful for other reasons later. In some cases, it can be useful in knowing you are receiving what you contracted to purchase, and not an entirely different piece of merchandise. Other information also may be found on the sample label that will benefit you later, so make or obtain a copy of the entire label.

Such things as whether or not the fiber has been heat set, special finishes that have been applied, the weight of the face fiber, the kind of backing(s) used and warranty or guarantee information offered by the manufacturer may be on the label. Be sure to read all the small print on the warranty or guarantee.

The construction method and materials used¹ in a carpet, along with the padding and installation method used, determine the durability and longevity of a carpet.

Special Considerations

Special characteristics should be considered for each room, as well as each living situation, before buying. These include the activities of the space, the traffic, color, acoustical properties desired, insulation qualities needed, tolerance to sunlight or other weather conditions, and safety.

Every household differs in its use of space, so each family must carefully evaluate the type of floor covering it needs.

Heavy-use areas need heavy-duty, durable carpeting, while lighter-use areas need only medium to low-quality carpeting.

If a wheelchair, crutches or walker will be used in the space, the floor cover should be as smooth and compact as possible. This does not exclude the use of carpeting; it merely suggests the use of low, one-level densely packed, pile carpet. Looped pile rather than cut pile is preferred for ease of wheel or crutch/walker leg- tip movement.

Consider the abrasiveness of the carpet surface if crawling infants or young children are in the family. The more abrasive the carpet, the harder it will be on the knees, hands, shoes and slacks of little people.

Activities/traffic

There are different types of activities, activity levels and traffic in each part of your home. These differences should be considered in selecting the floor covering.

A home may be divided into work areas (kitchen, bathroom, laundry, hobbies, shop), entertainment areas (living room, dining room, family room), private areas (bedrooms, den/study), traffic ways (entries, hallways, stairs) and outdoor living areas.

Carpeting for work areas and heavy traffic areas usually is best if constructed in short, dense, tightly looped, one-level pile. A good moisture barrier between the primary and secondary backings keeps any moisture spills from penetrating the sub-floor, creating mildew or rot. A soil/stain-resistant finish also is beneficial. Carpeting for these spaces should be very durable and resistant to crushing and abrasion.

Private areas usually do not receive the use of other areas in the house. Any color, texture, fiber or pile height may be acceptable in these spaces. Durability usually is not critical in private space.

Entertainment areas usually receive heavy use and should have very durable floor covering with good resistance to abrasion, crushing and soiling.

Color

Color selection may be one of the easiest decisions for you. You know what you have, what you like and

what you want the final result to be. When you are ready to go shopping for carpeting, take your knowledge, ideas, measurements and fabric samples, and see what the market has to offer.

Colors always should be viewed in natural daylight and in artificial light in the space you plan to use the color. Take the carpet samples home to look at them in nightlight as well as daylight, and with your belongings, not the store surroundings. The larger the sample, the easier it will be for you to make a decision.

Solid colors and light colors tend to make space appear larger, while patterned and dark colors usually make space appear smaller. Don't let those facts hinder you in doing something you really want to do, however.

Soiling shows more readily on white or light yellow carpeting. Medium colors, color blends and patterns are best for disguising signs of use between cleanings. Darker colors tend to show lint and accumulated dust more readily than light or medium colors. Selecting a color value the same as the usual soil in your locality helps keep carpet looking soil-free longer.

Color is psychologically important. It can affect not only the apparent size of a space, but the temperature and mood of a room. The use of warm or cool colors depends on personal preferences, climate and the orientation of your home. Blues and greens often are preferred in rooms having natural light and southern exposure. Warmer colors may be preferred in rooms having northern exposure and little natural light.

Dark rooms might be made lighter using the pastel tones of warm or cool colors. Light rooms may be darkened using various shades of colors. Warm colors might be good choices for homes in regions having long, snowy seasons, although cool colors should not be ruled out. Just the opposite applies to using cool colors in regions of great warmth. Don't select carpeting only on the basis of color.

Acoustics

Carpeting can improve the acoustical and insulative value of a space. Cut pile carpeting is more effective for sound absorption than loop pile. As pile height and density increase in cut pile, sound absorption improves. For loop pile carpeting, however, pile height appears more important than density. Any padding will increase the carpet's effectiveness in reducing sound.

Energy

Carpeting can reduce heat loss through the floor. Savings may be most noticeable in extreme climates, especially if carpet is installed on an uninsulated floor over a crawl space or concrete slab. Pile density and padding are the important factors to consider here.

For insulating value, wall-to-wall carpeting constructed with a deep, dense pile having a thick, densely air-pocketed urethane padding serves you best.

Carpets are not a wise choice for sun-lighted spaces you wish to use for passive solar collection. Research shows the thinnest of carpets impede solar collection in the floor heat sink.

Carpet used in any sun-lighted area fades less if solution- dyed. Neutral colors show the least fading, but darker colors absorb more heat into the space.

Outdoor carpet

If outdoor living areas are to be carpeted, consider durability, maintenance and tolerance of weather conditions. Solution dyes tolerate sunlight better than other dyes. The fiber also must resist sunlight and heat. Polypropylene/olefin² intended for outdoor use has been chemically treated to resist sun damage. Untreated polypropylene/olefin deteriorates in the sun.

Outdoor carpeting must be constructed so moisture can drain away. It must be capable of being washed with detergent and hose-rinsed. Jute-backed carpet will rot if used outdoors. If carpet is used near a pool containing chlorinated water, it must be able to withstand the chlorine and any other pool chemical used.

Snow and ice can build up in outdoor carpeting, making walking hazardous. Do not invest in outdoor carpet hoping to make the walkway less hazardous for winter walking.

The properly chosen outdoor carpeting can be an asset to the outdoor living space in your home. It may cut down on area maintenance, also.

Many factors influence the carpet selection you make. Knowing what those factors are before you go shopping or make your selection will help make the process less frustrating.

Also see:

- *G94-1222, Rug and Carpet Fibers: Selection and Care*
- *HEG 88-239, Rug Selection and Use*

This publication originally was written by Carol Jo Thompson for the Montana State University (MSU) Cooperative Extension Service. It is adapted here by permission of MSU.

¹See *NebGuide G94-1222, Rug and Carpet Fibers: Selection and Care*.

²Olefin fibers may be polyethylene/olefin or polypropylene/olefin. Labels often carry both terms for accuracy in fiber identification.

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