

How To Choose A Carpet Cleaner

By Sheila Johnson

Before you pick a carpet cleaning company at random from the phone book, ask your friends, family and coworkers for the names of companies they have worked with in the past. If you can't get a referral from family members or friends, check with your local Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce. Be sure to ask if the company you are considering has any complaints on file.

Ask for estimates based on the number of rooms that will be cleaned. Be sure to mention any problems that may need special attention such as oil stains, pet odors or damage from water or mold. If you need more than routine cleaning, it is best to have a representative of the cleaning company inspect the carpet first to determine the best method to use.

It is also smart to check with the carpet manufacturer for any special care recommendations for your particular type of carpet. Keep in mind that simple household cleaning products cannot remove some spills and stains. A professional deep cleaning can usually restore a stained carpet to a like-new appearance and help prolong its life.

Don't choose a carpet cleaner based on the lowest price. A fly-by-night company using unprofessional methods and cheap cleaning materials could actually do more harm than good. Look for a company that uses state-of-the art equipment and guarantees its work. Some carpet cleaning companies offer a low price to persuade you to call, but then add on services you thought were included in the price.

Many cleaning companies own professional carpet cleaning systems but their technicians receive no formal training in how to use them. Ask how technicians are trained, if they are certified, and what the company does to stay abreast of new cleaning technology.

Ask questions of the cleaning service until you fully understand which method suits your needs best. You can choose from steam cleaning and dry or wet chemical cleaning methods. A professional carpet cleaning company can analyze your particular situation and carpet type to determine the method best suited for your home. Some natural fiber carpets like wool and cotton can shrink or become discolored if a wet cleaning method with a long drying period is used.

A carpet cleaner that uses a residue-free rinse process is preferable since sticky residue left on a carpet can re-soil quickly. Be sure to ask if the cleaning process requires a long drying time. (Some companies provide fans to speed up the drying process).

Among the different methods carpet cleaners use are dry extraction, absorbent pad, dry-foam cleaning and steam cleaning. The dry extraction method uses an absorbent compound combined with detergents and solvents to loosen dirt from the carpet pile so that it can be vacuumed up. Dry-foam cleaning uses a detergent solution mixed into foam and applied with a brush machine before being wet-vacuumed up. Steam cleaning usually involves using a chemical treatment to loosen ground-up dirt followed by a pressurized cleaning solution injected into the pile and extracted using a high-power vacuum. The absorbent pad method uses a machine somewhat like a floor buffer to remove soil with absorbent spin pads.

Most carpet cleaning companies offer special treatments for neutralizing pet odors in carpet and upholstery and they can provide assistance for smoke and water damage caused by a fire or flood.

Keep in mind that when you hire a carpet cleaning service, you are letting strangers come into your home. Take precautions to remove valuables, cash and collectibles that you can't replace. Make sure the company you hire is bonded and insured against theft, loss and breakage. Most reputable carpet cleaning services offer some type of guarantee that the work will be performed professionally or your money will be returned.

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