

How To Choose New Carpet

By Cathy Knopp

Although hardwood floors have made a comeback, most consumers prefer to have at least part of their home carpeted. Carpeting feels warm and soft underfoot and is much quieter than other types of flooring. The variety of styles, colors and textures available today makes it easier than ever to choose the perfect carpet for any room in your home. Manufacturers have also improved carpeting construction, which makes the carpeting you buy today more stain resistant and long-lasting.

Carpets are constructed of fiber blends or manufactured entirely from nylon, polypropylene (olefin), polyester, or wool. Nylon is one of the most popular carpet fibers due to its durability and versatility. Most nylon styles have stain-resistant properties. Polypropylene (olefin) is increasing in popularity because it is very resistant to stains, fading and moisture. Polyester is also stain and fade resistant and offers excellent color and softness. Wool has a luxurious feel and is usually more expensive than synthetic fibers. It requires careful maintenance but appeals to many people since it is a natural fiber.

Carpeting is a major purchase so it is important to understand the basic elements of construction and style to determine the best choice for your home. Higher durability and density ratings mean enhanced comfort and better performance. A higher twist level prevents crushing and matting. Face weight refers to the number of ounces of fiber per square yard. A higher face weight is an indicator of better quality.

Plush carpeting is cut pile constructed from untwisted yarn. The ends form a smooth surface making it more suited for formal rooms than heavy traffic areas.

Cut pile features loops that are cut, leaving individual yarn tufts. It is one of the most popular choices for its versatility and durability. The type of fiber, density of tufts and the twist of the yarn can vary according to style and manufacturer.

Frieze is a type of cut pile carpet recommended for heavy traffic areas such as a bedroom or family room. The high twist construction of the yarn tufts curl at the surface to hide footprints.

Saxony features a dense, cut pile. The yarn tufts are close together forming a smoother surface than other carpet styles. It is frequently used in less formal rooms but will show footprints.

Textured carpets are constructed with twisted yarn tufts. They don't show footprints, are highly stain resistant, and easily adapt to formal or casual room settings. A textured carpet with a neutral color can add more interest to a room without need for a multicolored pattern or bright color.

Loop pile features loops that are uniform in height for a more informal look. It is often used in high traffic areas. Several of today's popular Berber styles are constructed of loop pile with chips of a darker color interspersed on a light background.

Cut and loop pile combines both cut and looped yarns and is available in a variety of textures ranging from sculptured squares to swirls.

When shopping for carpeting, consider your family's lifestyle, pets, what you'll be using your carpeted rooms for and how the carpeting will complement other furniture, window coverings and decor. Carpeting that is impractical for the family room might look great in a seldom-used formal dining room or guest bedroom.

Light colors can make small rooms appear larger while dark colors work well in living rooms with vaulted ceilings or large master bedrooms. Most people know that light colors soil more easily, but many people forget that dark colors show lint. Neutral tones and textured styles with colors from nature are usually the best choices for minimizing the appearance of dirt and lint. They also lend themselves to most decorating schemes and complement all styles of decorating.

Don't be shy about asking for carpet swatches to take home. Keep in mind that any color you choose will be covering a large area. A small purple swatch might look great as a pillow accent but it could be too intense for an entire room. Be careful in trying to match carpet colors to existing upholstery. Lighting also has a major impact on carpet color. Take the time to view your sample in natural light, under an overhead light and with the indirect light of a lamp to determine if the color you've chosen looks good.

Remember that the padding you place underneath the carpet will affect comfort and performance. You may pay more initially for thicker, mildew and water-resistant padding, but it can add years to your carpet's life. Make sure you receive care instructions for your new carpet because proper maintenance will significantly affect its long-term performance.