

How To Install Carpet

By Curt Hagedorn

Though carpet can be slightly more forgiving than wood, stone or ceramic tile in terms of ease of installation, there are still pitfalls along the way for the inexperienced do-it-yourself-er. Particularly if you are planning to install carpet in every room, have a complicated floor plan with many alcoves, stairs, and architectural features that impact the floor, or are planning on purchasing particularly expensive material, always consider professional installation – often included in the price of your purchase.

Today's homeowners have a wide variety of choices in the world of carpeting. Thousands of colors, patterns and materials from natural fibers to stain resistant synthetics all can provide warmth, comfort and style to any room in the house. This variety of choices, while perhaps overwhelming, can allow you to express your personal taste with bold colors and exciting patterns and textures or create that neutral pallet that "goes with everything" and also, for those of you interested in that sort of thing, can increase or at least not detract from the resale value of your home – and all as close as your nearest carpet or floor covering dealer or home store.

Though carpet can be slightly more forgiving than wood, stone or ceramic tile in terms of ease of installation, there are still pitfalls along the way for the inexperienced do-it-yourself-er. Particularly if you are planning to install carpet in every room, have a complicated floor plan with many alcoves, stairs, and architectural features that impact the floor, or are planning on purchasing particularly expensive material, always consider professional installation – oftentimes included in the price of your purchase through special offers or depending upon the size of your purchase. Professional installers should be bonded, experienced and be able to provide references – in other words, you don't want your carpet installation in the hand of a couple of student on summer break with 15 minutes of training, even if it is free. Though the step-by-step process with all the variations depending on location is far too complicated to list here, here are some other tips if you decide to install carpeting yourself.

1) Beauty is only skin deep. Again, though carpet can be more forgiving of surface irregularities than tile or wood, you need a clean, smooth, dry, level surface over which to install your beautiful carpeting. Any lumps, bumps or leftover nails on the floor will result in irregular patterns of wear and eventually even rips or tears later in the carpet's life. Also, cheap padding is never a good idea, make sure your padding is appropriate for the type of carpet you are using, and is made out of a long lasting natural or synthetic – your padding should have the same kind of guarantees as your carpeting. Also, make sure you inform your dealer of the location you are installing your floor covering – basement installations and other below-

grade or quasi-outdoor applications like a sunroom or porch may call for different materials that are moisture or mildew resistant.

2) It's not nice to fool Mother Nature: Synthetic fibers and even carpets made from natural materials, as well as padding, often can "off-load" unpleasant smelling or even potentially harmful gases from the chemicals used in processing them. If this is of concern to you and your family, ask your dealer about ways of having your carpeting "aired." Some carpet dealers or manufacturers will actually lay out your carpet and padding for a prescribed period to allow for out-gassing of that "new carpet smell" that some people like but which can cause allergic reactions in others.

3) Size matters. No matter what kind of home improvement project you are taking on, the rule is "measure twice, cut once" or, in reality, more like "measure twice, measure again until two sets of numbers match, measure again to be sure, then cut." The fewer cuts between rooms, the fewer seams, etc. you will have to hide, and professionals often use paper or cardboard templates which they then fit to the room first, and also leave a 4-6 inches to cut the carpet directly to the edge of the wall. Cutting is the most critical step, so take a class, watch a video or otherwise educate yourself before chopping up that expensive wool berber.

4) Have the tools of the trade. Sharp razor knives, accurate tape measures, plus specialty items like a "tackless strip" which rings your room and to which you attach carpet, a "knee-kicker" which helps you stretch your carpet to the "tackless strip," "seaming tape" to join carpet together, and what is called a "power stretcher" which will help stretch carpet evenly to hook onto the "tackless strip" on the opposite wall. These items can often be purchased or rented at your local home store – along with a book or video to tell you how to use them.