



EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

What's Underfoot: Carpet Choices for the Home¹

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When selecting a carpet, you will be confronted with many choices. Numerous colors, textures, fibers and qualities are found in the market and tend to be confusing, especially since you do not make a major carpet purchase very often.

Carpet is popular because of its decorating versatility, ease of maintenance, acoustical and safety properties, and ease of installation. As with any major purchase, several factors should be considered before the shopping begins.

A basic understanding of some of the technical aspects of carpet fibers and construction can assist you in making wiser carpet choices. Combining this knowledge with your own personal expectations and needs can ensure you will bring home an appropriate and satisfactory carpet.

Ask yourself the following questions to prepare for the decisions you will be facing while shopping.

1. What size is the space to be carpeted?

2. How is the space used?

3. Do the needs of the very old, the very young, the allergy prone or the handicapped require a special type of carpet?

4. Will pets be allowed on the carpet?

5. Is the residence considered a temporary or a permanent home?

6. Are there special concerns about moisture, sand, and the sun?

7. What are your personal preferences concerning color, style, texture, period of furnishings, and decorating style?

8. What are your realistic cleanliness and maintenance standards?

Carpeting for Various Spaces

Lifestyles and activities influence the selection of carpeting in a house. Space in a home may be divided into specific areas such as:

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- work areas — kitchen, bathroom, laundry, hobby room, workshop
- entertainment areas — living room, dining room, family room
- private areas — bedrooms, den/study
- traffic ways — entries, hallways, stairs
- outdoor living areas

In addition to space use, consider carpet features, room size, safety principles, acoustical properties, insulation properties, and environmental conditions.

Carpet Features

For heavily used traffic areas such as family rooms, stairways and hallways, you should select a short, dense, tightly looped or a combination looped/cut-pile carpet with abrasion resistance. Tweed, patterned, multicolored and tone-on-tone carpets help camouflage soil and lint.

Very light and very dark colors tend to show lint, footprints and accumulated dust more readily than colors in the medium range.

Look at the twist on the strands of yarn. A puffed look indicates a carpet will not wear well. Multiple strands of yarn that have been tightly twisted wear well. Uncut loops usually wear better than cut ones. Soil and stain-resistant finishes and fibers are also beneficial.

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

Wall-to-wall carpeting, which is attached to the floor, creates a unified look in a room, and contributes to the continuity from one room to

another. The carpeting makes rooms look larger, adds warmth, promotes safety and usually requires less maintenance than other flooring types. Unfortunately, the heavy traffic areas show wear faster. The carpet cannot be turned and must be cleaned while on the floor.

Carpet squares are available in 12 or 18 inch squares that can be laid loosely on the floor. The squares can then be rotated depending on the wear pattern in heavy traffic areas. Unique designs can be created with carpet squares.

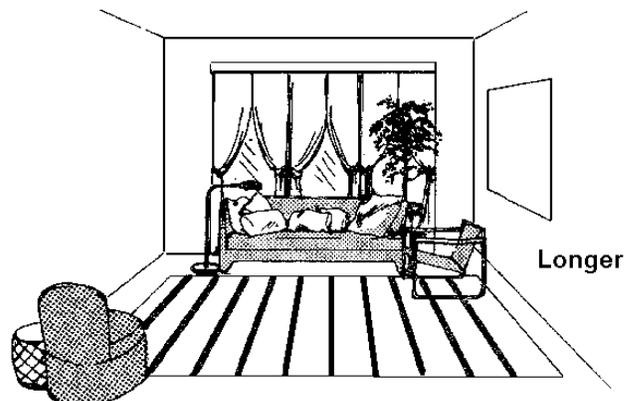
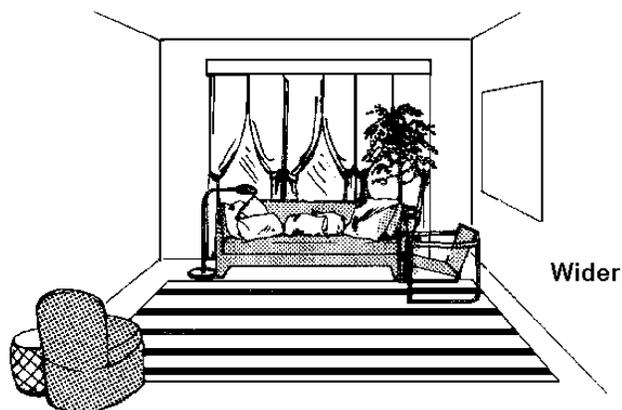
Carpet is woven in strips from 27 inches to 18 feet wide. Wide widths are known as *broadloom*, and most commonly come in widths of 12 and 15 feet. The carpet strips can be seamed together to cover large areas, since carpet is usually permanently attached to the floor and extends from wall-to-wall. However, carpet can be cut into *room size or area rugs* and laid loosely on the floor.

Room Size

Consider the *room's size* when making a carpet choice. Wall-to-wall carpets in solid colors or overall texture will give a spacious feeling. Continuing the same indoor/outdoor carpeting from inside a room out onto a deck, balcony or a patio will make the space seem visually larger. Different patterns tend to create different illusions of space (See Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4). Try to visualize what will happen to your room before you decide on a carpet.

Safety Features

Special safety features are additional aspects to consider. If a wheelchair, crutches or walker will be used in the space, the floor cover should be smooth, compact and static-resistant. 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 wheelchair or crutch/walker



leg-tip movement. Thick rugs, area carpets, high pile carpeting or thick padding can cause foot-drag that can be dangerous, especially for the elderly. Avoid large color contrasts since they tend to appear as a change in levels to the visually impaired.

Consider the texture 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 pants of children. At the same time, more abrasive carpet surfaces are durable, so carefully weigh selection factors.

Acoustical Properties

Carpeting can improve the acoustical and insulative value of a space. Cut-pile carpeting is more effective for sound absorption than loop pile. As the pile height and density increase with cut pile, the sound absorption improves. For loop-pile carpeting, however, sound is affected more by height than density. Padding also increases carpet's effectiveness in reducing sound.

Insulation Properties

Research shows 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

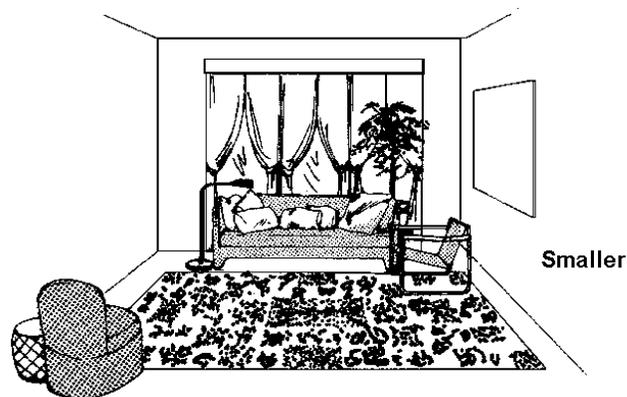
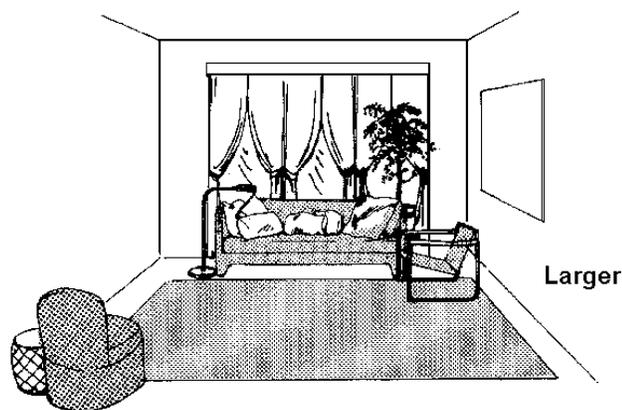
crawl space or concrete slab. Pile density and padding contribute to the insulative effectiveness. Wall-to-wall carpeting made with a deep, dense pile used with a thick, densely air-pocketed urethane padding serves you best.

Carpets are not a wise choice for sunlit spaces used for passive solar collection. Research shows the thinnest of carpets impede solar collection in the floor, therefore tile is usually recommended.

Environmental Conditions

The way the dye or color is applied to rugs affects both the appearance and resistance to sun fading. Solution-dyed carpet fades less in sunlit areas than other types of carpet. Also, medium neutral colors show the least fading, but darker colors absorb more heat into the space.

Solution dyeing takes place while the fibers are still in the liquid state. These synthetic fibers are especially resistant to fading. Another method is *yarn dyeing*, which is done by forcing dye through the yarn before or after the fiber is spun. *Space dyeing* is a technique that makes possible the application of two or more colors to the yarn at predetermined intervals. This technique can create a multicolored surface that hides soiling. In *piece dyeing*, the completed rug or carpet is dyed as a whole. *Printing* applies a color pattern to the completed rug.



Carpet Decorating Principles

Use design principles to help make a wise carpet choice for decorating a room successfully. Color, texture and emphasis are major factors.

Each room should have furnishings planned around a *center of interest*. A floor covering can be the center of interest, or play a supportive role to another center of interest such as a fireplace, window, painting, or furniture grouping.

The carpet *color* can be chosen from a color in the wall covering, drapery or furniture fabrics, or a major accessory in the room. A multicolored or patterned rug can give life to a neutral color scheme.

Solid colors and light colors tend to make spaces look larger. A solid-colored rug of a medium shade usually becomes part of the background that tames a bright, busy room, and enlarges the space visually. Patterns and dark colors usually make spaces appear smaller.

Brighter and darker colors used in a large space will seem less demanding than the same colors used in small rooms. However, very bright or intense colors and large patterns may become tiring.

Consider using cooler colors such as greens, blues and violets in sunny rooms with southern and western exposures and natural light. Cool

colors can be considered a good choice in warm climates. Consider using warmer colors such as reds, yellows and oranges in rooms with northern exposure and little natural light. Warm colors are a good choice in cold climates.

Smooth textures and solid colors are usually considered more formal, although oriental-type patterns can be formal or informal. Pattern size should be in scale with the room — generally small patterns in small rooms and large patterns in large rooms.

Rough textures and tweeds add interest and can be very successful in informal rooms. Some textures create patterns. You can create an interesting effect by using a variety of textures and a limited number of colors when furnishing a room or home. The cut and uncut pile, the high-low pile or the sculptured pile may be used to focus attention on the floor.

Insufficient lighting can cause carpet colors to appear dull, lifeless and dreary. As illumination increases, colors become more vibrant.

When selecting carpet from a small sample, remember that carpet with a deep, textured surface will appear darker than a smooth velvet carpet dyed the same color. Also, the carpet color will be darker than the small sample when a large amount is laid on the floor. Look at the carpet sample on the floor, not on the rack, and step on the carpet with the pad you are considering purchasing.

Take the carpet samples home to look at with your belongings in nightlight as well as daylight. View the carpet in natural daylight and in the light in the space where you plan to use the color. The larger the sample, the easier it will be for you to make a decision.

Final Checklist

- Check the label. The manufacturer's name, the fiber's generic name, percentages of each fiber content and the country of origin for imported carpets must be on each carpet sample and rug label. A wall-to-wall carpeting roll will not have a label when it arrives, but the invoice should include the same information as the label.
- Find out what is included in the purchase price. Will the installers move your furniture and take up your old carpet and dispose of it? If so, how much will this cost? Ask about the cost of the pad, metal stripping for thresholds, below-grade installation charges, installation for stairs and how much sales tax will be charged.
- Ask where the seams will be located. A seam in a heavy traffic area decreases the potential life of the carpet. Seams in tightly woven loop carpets are unsightly if improperly installed, or placed where they are easily visible.

- To obtain a “all park” figure of the cost of the carpet you are considering purchasing, multiply the length by the width of the room, which will give you the square footage. Deduct any areas in the room that will not be carpeted. Add 10% more carpet for matching and installing carpet.. Padding is figured the same way.

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