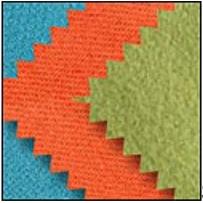


Making the Right Fabric Choice

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Shopping for fabric can be overwhelming. There are so many different colors and types of fabrics available, and the prices can range from a few dollars a yard to over one hundred. Home decor fabrics tend to be more expensive, so you want to be happy with what you select. Following a few basic guidelines will help you in your selection process.

If you are using a pattern, the back will often contain recommendations for fabric choice. This is a good starting point. You don't *have* to stick with what they suggest; these are simply recommendations for the type of fabrics most likely to produce favorable results. Feel free to choose what you like best, but if the pattern calls for a stiff fabric like a cotton duck or wool and you decide to substitute a shear silk, you may run into some construction challenges.



Left to right: silk, cotton/polyester, cotton

If you are not using a pattern, consider your project. If you're making curtains, will you want to block out light? Then choose a relatively heavy fabric. If you want the curtains to merely filter the light, then choose a lighter fabric. The same goes for pillows. If they're going to be purely decorative, you can use a fabric that looks great but has a rough texture. But if you want pillows to sleep on, choose a fabric with softness and durability.

You will also want to consider the existing upholstery and furnishings of the room you are decorating. Make sure the new items you're adding will coordinate. Pay attention to texture as well as color when making your fabric selection.

Remember that you're going to live with your fabric choice for a while. So take a sample home and set it out where you'll be using. Most fabrics stores will let you buy a ¼ or ½ yard sample cut. Then give yourself a few days before actually purchasing. You'll also get the the chance to see how the fabric and color looks at different times of the day.

Choosing a Fabric Source



Left to right: rayon, wool, polyester

In most cases, you get what you pay for. If you go to a professional source, like an upholstery shop or an interior designer, you'll pay more but you'll get the best quality.

Fabric stores will be less expensive and can offer you good quality. Many have special home decor sections with larger width cuts.

You can find bargains online, but be aware that color accuracy is a problem over the Internet. The shade you see on your

computer screen may not be what you get. If an online fabric store offers swatches, order them first.

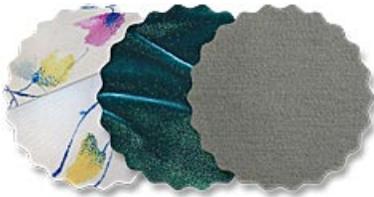
Pay careful attention to the manufacturer's fabric care instructions. Just because it's 100% cotton doesn't mean you can toss it in the washer with your jeans.

These are the major types of fibers/fabrics most often used in home decor:

Cotton



This natural fiber is still the most popular in the world. It's strong, absorbent, and soft. And it ages gracefully. There are more than two dozen kinds of cloth made from cotton fiber, from gauze to velveteen to duck.



Left to right: gauze, velvet, duck-canvas

Cotton's major drawback (and the reason polyester was invented) is that it wrinkles easily. Also, you need to preshrink it if you are going to wash the item you're making.

Polyester



It's not just for leisure suits and motel bedspreads. Many new kinds of polyester and polyester blends are very popular because they're not the stiff, itchy material of generations past. Polar fleece, micro-fleece, microfibre and polynosic have become favorites because of their natural feel.



Left to right: polar fleece, micro-fleece, microfibre, polynosic, chenille

Acrylic chenille is another favorite product commonly used for sweaters. You can wash them in the washing machine without wrinkles. Just don't overload the washer or dryer. Overloading is the biggest cause of wrinkles.

Cotton/Polyester Blends



Many designer fabrics are available as blends. When combined in the right proportions, with slightly more cotton than polyester, the result is a smooth, soft fabric that does not wrinkle, retains its shape after washing, and does not shrink.

Linen



Made of fibers from the flax plant, linen is one of the oldest woven fabrics in human history. Linen is an expensive fabric to manufacture and the quality of the finished linen depends largely on the quality of the plant itself. Fine linen is the fabric of luxury and is wonderful for elegant table settings, curtains or slipcovers. Linen is strong and absorbent but wrinkles unless specially treated. For a softer finish it can be washed, but it may shrink in the process.

Wool



Wool and wool blends are mostly designed to be garment fabrics. But you can use them for pillows, throws and creative home decor items. Also, you can find high-end upholstery fabrics made from wool. It's very long wearing, soft and warm. Because wool can shrink if you wash it, dry-cleaning is recommended, but you can wash wool items by hand in mild suds. Iron on low temperature and while still slightly damp.

Silk



The strongest natural fiber in the world, silk is gathered from cocoons made by silkworm larvae. The shimmering appearance and soft texture make it a favorite for luxury window coverings and bedding. Silk is absorbent so it dyes easily, but some dye colors tend to bleed and fade in water and during stain removal procedures. According to dry cleaners; red, green, blue and purple dyes are especially prone to problems. Also, be aware that sunlight will fade silk items and turn white silk garments yellow.

Rayon



Made from natural cellulose fibers, rayon was created as a cheaper alternative to silk. Its sheen and durability makes it suitable for bedspreads, blankets, curtains, antique-satin draperies, sheets, slipcovers, tablecloths and upholstery. Rayon is often blended with cotton, silk, polyester and other fibers. Dry cleaning or hand washing is usually recommended.

Acrylic



This man-made fiber is often blended in home decor fabrics. It is warm, can be quite soft, holds color well, and is both stain and wrinkle resistant. These attributes make acrylic fabric a popular choice, and for those who love wool but are allergic to it, acrylic can be an excellent substitute.

Nylon



Often used in sportswear and swimsuits, nylon a man made fiber. Because of its strength and durability, its often blended with other fibers for home decor fabrics. For instance, crushed velvet may be one-third nylon.

Acetate



Acetate is a man-made fiber that does not absorb moisture readily, dries fast and resists shrinking. This is a resilient fabric that resists wrinkling in addition to being pliable and soft with a good drape. It's often blended with other artificial fibers to create fabric suitable for draperies and bedding. Remember, nail polish remover will melt acetate as will alcohol so take care around acetate with perfumes, nail products and SuperGlue™.

Fabric, Color & Texture

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