

Understanding Filler Materials: Polyfil, Pellets, Microbeads, Beanbag Filler, Foam & More

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"There's more than one way to stuff a pillow." I've never actually heard that used as an expression. But when I look at all the materials now available for filling pillows, it really rings true.

From natural fillers like feathers and fiber to the latest high tech fluff, you can choose a stuffing that's perfectly suited to your situation.

Cheapest Doesn't Always Save in the Long Run

If you're thrifty like me, you might be tempted to buy the least expensive pillow stuffing you can find. After all, it's just there to fill out the pillow cover, right? Not exactly. A number of times, I've used the cheapest polyester filler (sometimes in a pre-made pillow form) for a throw pillow and was eventually disappointed.

The pillows looked great when I first tossed them onto an overstuffed chair, but after being leaned on for a while, they flattened out and there was nothing I could do to fluff them up again.

My new rule is to use cheap polyester *only* if the pillows will be strictly ornamental – like throw pillows on a bed. Otherwise, I like to use something you can easily reshape, like down.

Choose a Filler to Enhance Your Pillow Experience

Not every pillow gets to sit there and look pretty. Some have a job to do. If you're making a travel pillow or even a regular sleeping pillow, you can choose a filler to maximize your comfort and even give you other health benefits.

Some people are looking to avoid artificial fibers and choose feathers, natural latex or even green tea to stuff their pillow. Others need their pillow to be truly hypoallergenic and so choose the latest in synthetic fibers. For example, a pillow filled with millet seed will conform comfortably to your head and, as an added bonus, will release soothing compounds while you sleep.

Some Popular Pillow Fillers to Consider

Synthetic

Polyester

This is the most popular and most budget-friendly. It's non-allergenic. You can wash it. And it's easy to find. Fairfield (see "Where to Find" links below) now makes a fluffier version of their original Polyfil with fibers that better resist flattening. You can also get polyester/cotton blends to give you added firmness.

Polyester Pellets

These look like little droplets of plastic and are often used by crafters to fill stuffed animals. But you can use them in little neck pillows all the way up to big floor pillows.

Microbeads

Think of them as extra small pellets. Manufactured to be almost perfectly uniform, these little beads slide easily against each other. Because they can be shaped and give support, they're often used to make therapy pillows.

Beanbag Filler

These are tiny polystyrene (that stuff they make cheap ice chests out of) beads. They're light and fluffy, and can be easily reshaped. They're designed for big beanbag chairs, but you can use them in other pillows as well.

Foam

You can find a lot of different kinds of foam, from the classic stuff they make chair pads out of to high tech Memory Foam. If you like the solid feel of foam but don't want artificial, you can get natural latex rubber. It does a nice job of conforming and supporting your body.

Natural

Down and Other Feathers

Made from the soft under feathers of ducks or geese, down has remained very popular through the years. It's even better now as improvements have been made in feather-proof casings and removing dander in the down. It's great for sleeping pillows and sofa pillows that will be sat on. Washing a down pillow is not recommended because it's difficult to dry the feathers properly. So you should make a removable cover.

Wool

This traditional filling takes advantage of the fiber's ability to stand up to years of wear without losing shape. A good pillow liner can make wool feel as soft as cotton.

Horsehair

Not just for cowboys. This natural fiber made of stiff mane hairs is naturally springy and retains its shape well. It makes a dry pillow texture – great for people who sweat while they sleep.

Natural Shredded Rubber

It's easy to forget that real rubber grows on (or in) trees. When shredded, natural rubber looks a little like cottage cheese, but has the nice firm feel of memory foam.

Seeds and Herbs

Buckwheat

This grain seed has been used in therapeutic pillows for years. Buckwheat gives firm support to small pillows. People like it for neck pillows or other travel pillows. Buckwheat can be noisy in a full size pillow.

Millet

Supposedly quieter than buckwheat, millet seeds are finer and give better contouring. They also contain silicic acid, which is released from the hulls via body heat and is reported to have numerous therapeutic properties.

Flaxseed

Used in small therapeutic pillows. You can make a long neck pillow with flaxseed and heat it in the microwave for soothing warmth. Flaxseeds don't give off an odor, which is to some people's liking.

Lavender

When harvested and dried, lavender buds give off a soothing aroma. You wouldn't want to sleep directly on a lavender-filled pillow (it's a little too crunchy). Instead, you can make a tiny lavender pillow to tuck under your regular pillow, where you can still enjoy the benefit of the pleasing smell without the annoying crunch. I mix a quarter cup of dried lavender with flax seed to fill a small lavender pillow.

Other Fillers

From silk to hemp, you can find dozens more things to stuff a pillow. A hand-made pillow stuffed with a natural or therapeutic filler makes a memorable gift.

A Few Places to Find Fillers Online

- [Jo-Ann Fabric & Craft Stores](#) (lots of different fillers online and in the store)
- [Fairfield](#) (makes Polyfil and lots of other fillers)
- [Northern Naturals Latex Pillows](#)
- [Perfect Products Online](#) (down pillow forms)
- [Overstock.com](#) (has a whole section of natural pillows at deep discounts)
- [Winco Foods](#) (a west coast grocery discounter where I buy my flax seed in bulk)
- [Rose Mountain Herbs](#) (a good source for dried lavender)

[Buying Guide](#)

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