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A GUIDE TO Carpet

Warm, comfortable and good looking, carpet is a winning flooring option. Get in the know about choosing the right one for your home – and caring for it – with our advice

The British are renowned for their love of carpet as a floor covering – and no wonder. It's tactile and cosy, visually appealing, and provides sound and heat insulation. It also offers the opportunity to create the style you want for your rooms by picking from plain or patterned finishes, subtle and understated neutrals or eye-catching bold colours, and a variety of textures.

As well as considering the aesthetic credentials of an individual carpet, it's also important to consider how much foot traffic it's going to get. You'll want to think about which fibres it's made from as well so you can be confident it'll stay looking good when children and pets do their worst. We've got all the information you need to make the right choice for every room, and the latest designs to inspire you.

TYPES OF CARPET

Carpets can be woven or tufted. The latter is the most popular and, because of the manufacturing technique, the most affordable. A tufted carpet is constructed with a backing fabric into which yarn is inserted. The carpet that's produced can have either a loop pile or a cut pile.

Axminster and Wilton are woven carpets. Wilton is the oldest method of weaving and can feature up to five colours with a range of textural finishes available, including loop pile, cut pile, and cut and loop. Axminster is patterned and can have up to 12 colours in a design. It only comes in one finish, which is velvet. The work that goes into one of these makes it a higher budget choice.

Wool and nylon carpet in Pineapple Smoothie, from £25 per m², Tudor Twist range, Victoria Carpets



STYLES OF CARPET

Consider the texture of carpet when you're buying. It affects both how it feels underfoot, and the appearance.

CUT-PILE carpet is made with yarn loops that are cut. The result is an upright pile. Twist is a type of cut pile. It has a textured rather than smooth appearance, but feels comfortable to bare feet. Pick from plain or heathered versions; the latter feature more than one colour of yarn for a flecked finish.

VELVET carpet also has a cut pile. The finish is smooth and luxurious. Rubbing the pile will make it appear darker, like suede, so it shows where the vacuum has been, but it's just a natural effect that comes with the smooth surface. It may appear as if it's less hard wearing than a twist, but this isn't the case if the carpet's fibre and weight in ounces per square yard are the same.

SAXONY carpet has a deep cut pile and looks and feels opulent. The downside is that it's prone to flattening. Save it for somewhere like a bedroom rather than areas of heavy foot traffic.

LOOP-PILE carpet is an alternative to cut-pile versions, and here the loops of yarn are left uncut. Avoid this pile if you have a pet with long claws in your home. However well-behaved the pet, claws can catch and unthread the loops.

Carpets can also combine cut and loop piles to create interesting textural effects and pattern.



Left Wool and r carpet in Iona D Egg, £83.99 per m², Laura Ashley collection, Brint

Below Masai Emerald wool flatweave runner, 70cm wide, £132 per linear m, Roger Oates



Wool and nylon carpet in Estuary, £76 per m², Braeburn range, Ulster Carpets

Q&A

YOU ASK, WE ANSWER

How should I clean carpet and deal with spills?

'A new carpet should be maintained regularly – and can be vacuumed as soon as it is installed,' says Rupert Anton of the Carpet Foundation. 'We recommend vacuuming at least twice a week – certainly in heavy usage areas, although it does depend on the degree of soiling. In areas that don't get as much use and wear, we suggest "as and when".'

'Cut-pile carpets, such as velvets and twist piles, should be cleaned with an upright vacuum cleaner with a beater bar and brush to realign the pile. Conversely, on loop-pile carpets, only use the suction head of a cylinder vacuum. It's important to clean stairs regularly, ensuring the pile is brushed towards the nosings on the treads.

'Home wet cleaning of a carpet is not recommended. Use a professional cleaner to do this as they will have the expertise to avoid damage like colour bleeding, and they will be insured. When spills and accidents do occur, don't panic, but act quickly. The sooner a spill is tackled, the less chance of a lasting stain. Generally, always blot and never rub a spill, and work from the outside in. Solids should be scraped up. Apply cleaning agent to a cloth and never directly onto the carpet, and only use carpet care treatments that are WoolSafe approved. Dry a spill with a hair dryer.

'If the issue is red wine, blot with white kitchen or paper tissues first. If that doesn't get it out, try a spot remover for water-based stains. If you can't remove it completely, call on a professional carpet cleaner. Tea should be tackled first with cold water, but if that doesn't work, use a carpet shampoo solution. For blood, try a carpet shampoo solution first, then, if you need to, a spot remover for water-based stains, and if a third try is required, cold water.'



Above Wool, nylon and melt polyester carpet in Highland. Dimensions Heather Stripe range, £44 per m². Brockway Carpets

Below Hamlet Heathers polypropylene twist carpet in Grey Stone, £29.99 per m². Carpetright

HOW MUCH DOES CARPET COST?

Expect to pay from around £15 per square metre for a synthetic carpet; from around £25 per square metre to more than £80 per square metre for a wool-rich mix; and from around £22 per square metre to over £150 per square metre for wool carpet.

A new carpet should be teamed with new underlay to ensure the carpet retains its appearance for longer, is more durable, and provides heat and sound insulation. This will be an extra cost, as will fitting. Get an estimate to see what the total for everything will be.

CAN I USE CARPET WITH UNDERFLOOR HEATING?

Carpet can be teamed with underfloor heating – just pay attention to the thermal resistance, expressed as the tog value, of the carpet and underlay when you're buying. Following a research project, the Underfloor Heating Manufacturers Association and the Carpet Foundation (the UK carpet industry's leading body supported by suppliers and carpet shops nationwide) recommend a maximum limit for carpet and underlay combined of 2.5 tog, with the underlay having a tog value of less than 1.3.

