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Best Fabrics for Sewing Slipcovers

Making your own slipcovers can be a satisfying way to give your furniture a new image. However, as well as choosing the color, when selecting your fabric you'll need to take into account its fiber content, weave structure and pattern.

The fiber content is important, as this influences how easy the fabric is to work with, how it can be cleaned and how durable and wrinkle-resistant the finished slipcover will be. Natural fiber fabrics, in particular cotton and linen, are preferable, as they have the qualities of breathability and durability. They tend to be easier to sew and to shape than synthetics.

Cotton is a good choice for slipcovers. It's generally easy to work with, hardwearing and washable. However, on its own, cotton can be prone to wrinkling, so it's often blended with a synthetic such as polyester to help it maintain a neat appearance.

Linen is a very durable fiber, which can be washed frequently and still look good. However, despite its quality of strength, linen is prone to wrinkling. After a few washes, those sharp wrinkles may appear more like gentle creases and could be considered attractive features. But, if you'd prefer a smoother finish, look for linen blended with another fiber to make the resulting fabric more wrinkle-resistant as well as cheaper.

Ramie is another natural fiber that results in a fabric much like linen, but which is both cheaper and less durable. It's quite often used in cheaper linen blends.

Silk fabrics are associated with beauty and luxury, and can make very attractive slipcovers. However, silk hasn't got the durability qualities of cotton or linen, and is best suited for use on furniture that's more decorative in purpose, or used only occasionally, rather than on a couch that gets used everyday.

Silk noil fiber can work well as a fabric for loose slipcovers, as it looks lovely draped over furniture. It has the benefit of being washable, as long as you remember to preshrink the fabric before you make your slipcover.

Synthetic fiber fabrics tend to be cheaper in price than natural ones. However, because they don't breathe and they tend to be slippery, 100% synthetic fabrics aren't ideal for furniture slipcovers, as they will be uncomfortable to sit on, especially in hot weather, and they can't be shaped so well. Having said that, when blended with natural fibers, man made fibers have the benefit of creating fabrics that are both

wrinkle-resistant and cheaper to buy, as well as being good to work with.

Acrylic increases the wrinkle-resistance of velvets and plush feel and is resistant to fading. However, it's not ideal for use in a fitted slipcover, as it won't keep its shape once it's been stretched.

Nylon doesn't look very appealing on its own, but when blended with natural fibers, can increase the strength and durability of the fabric.

Polyester blended with cotton is a good choice for a slipcover fabric. It's strong, resistant to fading and dyes well, and it can add wrinkle-resistance.

Rayon is a man made fiber made from cellulose. Like other synthetics, it's fairly inexpensive. On its own, it's not particularly durable, but when blended with a natural fiber can result in a good draping fabric for a loose slipcover. However, a drawback is that fabrics made from rayon generally need to be dry cleaned.

Some fabrics are known for their weave or surface pattern rather than their fiber content, such as velvet. **Velvet** refers to the smooth pile surface of the fabric and can be made from various combinations of different fibers. The weave influences how easy a fabric is to work with, how durable it will be, and how easy it is to care for. However, the fiber content is a more important consideration. For instance, a velvet made from polyester and cotton would be fully machine washable, whereas a silk velvet would require more gentle care.

Many decorating fabrics have the pattern woven or printed horizontally rather than vertically, and are stable on the cross grain too. This means they are suitable for railroading – a technique for using the fabric with the lengthwise grain running horizontally rather than vertically. These fabrics are well worth considering if you're making a sofa slipcover, as you'll save money by needing less fabric, and you'll have fewer seams to sew.

One last point to consider when choosing a slipcover fabric is to try to avoid fabrics with off-grain patterns, where a visibly horizontal pattern is out of line with the grain of the fabric, as the pattern would appear crooked on your finished piece. Try to avoid stripes or checks that are printed rather than woven. If they are printed off-grain it will be obvious in your finished slipcover.

As long as you stay away from heavy upholstery fabrics, almost any fabric could be used to make a slipcover, depending on what look you want, how much use your furniture gets and how easy you want it to be to care for.