

Carpet is a key decorative element in the home — the right carpet in a room adds comfort and style in a way no other flooring can match. However, carpeting your home is a major investment so you want to be sure that the carpet you've chosen not only looks good, but also is designed to last.

One of the most important components of a carpet is the fiber. The type of fiber used and the construction of the pile are the two key factors in determining how durable the carpet will be.

You need to find a carpet that will be durable as in the average home carpet is subjected to all manner of abuses in the run of its life, including foot traffic, stains, sunlight, pets and furniture being moved around.

According to the Carpet and Rug Institute in Georgia, approximately 97 percent of all carpet in North America is produced using synthetic fibers.

The following are the five basic types of carpet pile fibers:

Nylon: It is the most popular of the pile fibers sold in the United States. It is the most durable of the synthetics and offers excellent performance characteristics. It is wear-resistant, resilient and withstands the weight and movement of furniture. It offers good stain resistance and is an excellent choice for heavy traffic areas. It is available in beautiful colors, making it a great style choice throughout the home.

Olefin (polypropylene): A relatively inexpensive fiber, the use of olefin has been growing steadily over the past number of years. It is strong, resists wear and permanent stains, and is easily cleaned. As a solution-dyed product it is colorfast and resists bleaching and fading. Resists static electricity and is often used in both indoor and outdoor installations because of its resistance to moisture and mildew. It does not perform as well as some other fibers in terms of abrasion resistance, however, so the pile profile should be low. The Berber loop pile construction works well to counteract this tendency.

Polyester: Polyester fiber offers excellent color clarity and retention. It is also extremely fade resistant and provides excellent resistance to stains. It is noted for its luxurious feel when used in thick, cut-pile textures. It is easy to clean and resistant to water-soluble stains. On the downside, it has poor resilient properties and is susceptible to "flattening" out.

Acrylic: Acrylic offers the look and feel of wool without the cost. Has low static level and is moisture and mildew-resistant.

Wool: Wool is the classic favorite, offering both luxury and performance. It is considered the premium carpet fiber as it is strong, durable, yet feels soft and comes in beautiful colors. It cleans well and is naturally stain and soil resistant, but is generally much more expensive than synthetic fibers.

Blends: A wool/nylon blend combines the superior look and comfort of wool with the durability of nylon. Acrylic/olefin and nylon/olefin are other popular blends, offering good characteristics of each fiber.

Each fiber has strengths and weaknesses that need to be carefully considered when choosing a new carpet for your home. There is no perfect fiber and a good general rule to follow is that you will get what you pay for.

In other words, the wool vs. synthetic fiber question is less important than the overall quality of the carpet. If you can afford it, wool is an excellent choice and your carpet will look great for years to come, but don't be fooled into thinking wool is the only fiber that makes a good carpet; nylon also offers exceptional value.

For best performance, the primary thing to look for is **fiber content**, a tighter twist and denser weave. The twist is the number of "turns" in a fiber. A carpet with six turns in a half-inch is better than a carpet with only four turns in a half-inch, for instance. For density look at how close the rows of fibers are woven into the backing. A dense carpet will retain its shape but one that is not as dense will begin to flatten.