



Today's Textiles—Buying Sheets

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Buying new sheets for the bed has become a little overwhelming with all the choices on the market. Consumers are tempted to buy several sets of these colorful, luxurious products. How many sheets does one family need? While there are several theories out there, Cotton Incorporated sets the following guidelines: three sets of sheets and six pillowcases are needed for each bedroom—one set on the bed, one set in the laundry, and one set in the closet. How much do we pay for all of these luxuries? The average consumer spent \$123 purchasing sheets in 2003, averaging \$36 per sheet set. The majority of consumers say they prefer buying packaged sheet sets, and consumers have stated they are willing to spend more for products made of 100% cotton. In fact, the three most important factors for consumers when buying sheets were fit, softness and durability. By just walking down the aisles of your favorite store, or surfing the web, sheets can be found in all price ranges—even up to over \$1000 per set.

Making Sense of Sizes

What's new with today's sheets? A lot! Let's start with size. It's been said that "sheets are underwear for your bed" - so we know how important fit is! Many of today's mattresses are being manufactured to be thicker than they were in the past. Often when a consumer buys a new mattress, they may find their old bed sheets to be a little tight. Today's pillow top mattresses can be as thick as 24" - a big difference from the 8-12" mattresses most consumers are used to. If consumers own a new, thicker mattress, be sure to buy sheets that will fit. Purchasers will find these fitted sheets and sheet sets labeled that they will fit mattresses up to 24". It is recommended that mattresses are measured before shopping for any bedding.

Manufacturer's sizes may vary slightly; however these dimensions serve as good representations of what should be expected:

Twin	39" X 76"
Twin—X-Long	39" X 80"
Full or Double	54" X 75"
Queen	60" X 80"
King	78" X 80"
California King	72" X 84"



DISABILITIES ACCOMMODATED WITH PRIOR NOTIFICATION

Fiber Sense



The second thing to consider when sheet shopping is fiber content. Cotton is king with most consumers, but is far from the only option available when sheet shopping. Consider the following:

Cotton is a natural fiber, grown in the US and the world. It is a very comfortable fiber, and one that takes dyes well. Due to its chemical make-up, it attracts water and is therefore quite absorbent and cool. Since the main functions of a sheet are to not only protect the mattress, but to provide a comfortable sleeping surface, cotton is one of the best choices in sheet production.

In cotton production, carding is a process that untangles and straightens the cotton fibers so that they may be spun into yarns. Combing cotton involves an additional process that removes the short fibers, leaving only the long, smooth, uniform layers. The staple is the length of the cotton fiber—the longer the staple, the more luxurious and durable the cotton. These cotton fibers may be spun into the following bedding fibers.



Egyptian Cotton—Usually considered the top choice in sheets and pillowcases. True Egyptian cotton is grown in the Nile Valley, and includes the longest staple fiber—producing a silky smooth sheet. It can be blended with lower grade cottons, so look for 100% Egyptian cotton products for the best quality products.

Pima Cotton—First grown in 1912, it is the longest staple cotton grown in the southern United States. It is also smooth and durable. Supima cotton is the registered trademark for Pima cotton grown in the U.S.

Standard Cotton—The majority of the cotton grown in the Mississippi Valley area, this cotton produces good quality, less expensive sheets.

Cotton fibers may be used alone, or in combination with other fibers. Consumers will find the following options:

Polyester—One of the most widely used, manufactured or synthetic fibers, it resists shrinkage, stretching, mildew and wrinkling. It also washes and dries quickly.

Cotton/Polyester—This blend is often used in sheets to take advantage of the comfortable characteristics of cotton, plus the usefulness of polyester. Most blended sheets are a 50/50 blend. While some don't think this combination could result in a great feeling sheet, they are wrong. It is possible to have a blended sheet that feels silky too. New on the market—an embedded cotton/polyester blend that claims to wick away moisture to help with night sweats!

Cotton/Spandex—New on the market in 2004, these fitted sheets are made of cotton covered spandex to take advantage of the softness of cotton and the stretchiness of spandex. This better fitting sheet provides a smoother surface for the consumer. It is, however, a more costly product to purchase.

Making Sense of Thread Count

Although fiber content is important, it is not the only consideration when buying sheets. **Thread count consists of the number of yarns in one square inch of fabric.** The number of yarns lengthwise (wrap) is added to the number crosswise (weft) to get the total count. For best wear, the two sets of numbers should be equal. Although this information is not usually stated on the label, it can be determined with a magnifying glass, but is not a big concern for the average consumer.



Thread counts can range from 80 to over 1000, and generally, the higher the thread count, the softer the fabric feels and the more pill-resistant it is. A lower thread count usually means a thicker, less soft yarn. Because manufacturers utilize finer yarns using more material, high thread count sheets tend to be more expensive. However higher thread counts usually extend the life of the fabric, so the consumer may save money in the long run.

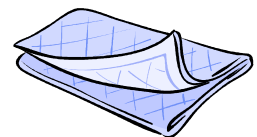
Many consumers are familiar with the older way of defining thread count, through terms such as muslin and percale. Although these terms are still used occasionally, more often we simply see thread count itself listed.

Muslin—Sheets made of muslin fabric tend to feel rough and are not readily available in the market anymore. They are made of carded cotton, with a thread count range from about 128-160. Muslin sheets may be all cotton, but were more typically 70% polyester and 30% carded cotton—adding to their roughness. These sheets tend to pill a lot, and often have an uneven weave.

Percale—Sheets made of percale fabric are made of combed cotton, have a plain weave, and a minimum thread count of 180, and typically up to 220. This type of sheet is found in most middle-range hotels, and most consumers find this type of sheet to be very satisfactory. In addition, percale sheets are often 50% combed cotton/50% polyester.

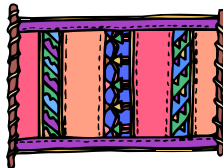
Luxury linens—So how many threads does a person need in their bed sheets? Generally a thread count over 300 is considered more than the average person can distinguish. Very high thread counts are considered to be over 600.

Another thing for consumers to be aware of is ply. Twisting the yarns together before weaving creates a two-ply yarn, compared to the traditional single yarn used in most sheets. Since two ply yarn doubles the thread count, the fabric may be heavier or stiffer, or the yarn size will be reduced to produce a two-ply yarn that is comparable in size to a single yarn. When purchasing imported sheets, manufacturers count each yarn used as a thread. If a thread is made of two ply yarn, and contains 300 threads, it can be advertised as having a 600 thread count. By utilizing two ply yarn, thread count is doubled. This allows the manufacturer to produce higher thread counts. Sheets manufactured in the U. S. do not utilize this method of determining thread count—a 600 thread count sheet has 600 threads per inch.



Can you believe thread count claims? This is another factor to consider. According to the Good Housekeeping Institute, reading is not always believing. Their test panels literally counted individual threads contained in an inch of various sheeting. They found that often thread count numbers are inflated by counting the individual plies within a yarn, rather than the individual yarns themselves. How can a consumer make sense of this? Use common sense. Beware of high thread count sheets with low costs. Sheets with thread counts over 500 will cost a consumer a minimum of \$150. In addition, a sheet with a true high thread count should increase in softness while maintaining its luster after a few trips through the washer and dryer.

Weaving Sense



Thread counts are very important to many customers, as they believe high thread count equals high quality. Considerations must also be made, however, for weave of the fiber and finishes.

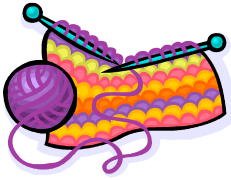
When manufacturing sheets, many different options are available in the type of fabric weave used. Most sheeting fabrics have a **simple or plain weave interlacing** (1 thread X 1 thread). Muslin and percale sheets have this crisp, lightweight weave.

Today there are many special weaves on the market. **Pinpoint, basket or rib weave** are used in higher count percales, and consists of two or more threads grouped in a one-over, one-under weave pattern, creating a two-ply product. **Cotton sateen or satin weave** is the weaving process which allows yarns to float over other yarns (4 or more yarns float over the crosswise yarns), creating a shiny surface and soft feel to sheeting. Although most consumers find these to be among the softest sheets available, they have been found to not hold up as well as percale sheets. These satin weave sheets were susceptible to jewelry or nail snags. Make note, however, these are not related to synthetic satin sheets that were popular several years ago. Those sheets were considered too slippery and uncomfortable due to their inability to breathe.

Dobby weave creates a raised texture, and the **Jacquard** weave includes a patterned look, made by controlling the warp and weft yarns into a design. These products tend to be more expensive due to the preparations needed for weaving the design. Often consumers do not find these special woven fabrics to be as comfortable as plain woven sheets.

Special Preparations

Flannel weave - is traditionally used with 100% cotton fibers, and is quite warm and comfortable. These sheets are typically muslin fabric that has been finished by passing over wire brushes to create a surface change on the fabric. Brushing raises the fiber ends and enables the fabric to trap air and provide insulation or warmth. For the consumer, quality should be determined by reviewing the surface of the sheet. It should be even—too many lumps or pills indicate a poor quality product.



Knitted sheets are very popular with today's youth—seeking the comfort of their favorite t-shirt in their bed sheets. They are produced with the jersey stitch—yielding a product similar to a t-shirt fabric. The stretch ability offered by the interlocking yarns keeps these sheets fitting comfortably. These same loops, however, can make these sheets easy to snag or pill. Broken loops can produce a run.

The world of weaving continues to make advances in producing the highest quality sheets. Future techniques that will be available soon include a process called cotton compact yarns. This is a ring spinning technology that produces yarns that are stronger, with a softer feel and color that remains bright after each wash.

Final Indicators of Quality

Color of sheets is one of today's great options. Consumers most often purchase pastel colored products, followed by neutrals, and then dark colors. While colored sheets add interest to the bedroom, they may fade over time. This is especially noticeable with dark sheets, and may be especially obvious if the sheets have a matching comforter which is not laundered as often as the sheets themselves.



Wrinkle control finishes are being used more and more today as consumers turn to all cotton products with increasing numbers. These finishes allow today's sheets to look great without ironing, and do not reduce sheet softness.

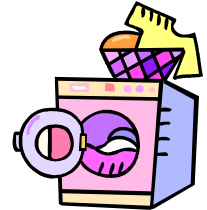
To determine **durability**, several things can be readily viewed on sheets. Begin by looking at the selvage. A good sheet is woven with extra threads in the selvage to make it firm and strong. The selvage should be clean and neat with no loose, untidy threads. Hems should be straight and flat, sewn with short stitches. Top hems on good quality sheets should be at least 3-4" wide, and bottom hems 1" wide. Decorative top hems might include lace, scalloping, eyelet trim or piping. When reviewing the elastic around the fitted or bottom sheet, consumers will see several options. Many have elastic edging all the way around the sheet for easy fitting over the sides and corners of the mattress. A second type has elastic along the sides, while a third has elastic only at the corners. All allow for a good fitting bottom sheet.



Unless marked, sheets are first quality and will have even, high quality fibers and workmanship. Seconds or irregulars may contain some weaving imperfections or simple cosmetic problems such as stains produced during production. Consumers can find great values with these products purchased at outlet or other stores. Be sure to inspect the sheets, however, as severe flaws in the products will lead to a shorter life, and may not be a bargain after all.

Care Sense

Most sheets are easy and quick to care for. It is recommended to wash your sheets before the first use to remove any excess finishes and get a better idea of the fit. Most stores will allow sheets to be returned after a few washes if quality has deteriorated. While most consumers wash sheets on a weekly basis, it is a personal choice. Machine wash sheets with like colors according to their care instructions. Most white sheets can be washed in warm or hot water. Colored sheets should be washed in warm or cold water, and should be washed separately for the first wash to avoid color bleed. Use the delicate cycle for linens with lace or other delicate trim. Fabric softeners can be used for added softness and scent. When using bleach, avoid over use, as this can cause permanent damage to fibers. Remove all items from the dryer as soon as they are dry to also avoid excessive wrinkles. Avoid further wrinkling by folding sheets immediately for storage. Some manufacturers recommend letting sheets "rest" by rotating the three sets of recommended sheets. Store sheets in a dry, flat place such as a linen closet or chest of drawers. For a special treat, add a scented sachet in the storage area for a pleasing scent.



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