

Guide to Upholstery Fabrics

Upholstery fabric is made either from a 100% composition of one kind of upholstery fibres or a combination (blend) of two or more. When fibres are woven or knitted into a material that can be used for covering then it is called a fabric.

The following is a glossary of some of the more popular fabrics used in upholstery. We hope you will find it helpful.

Absorbency	The ability of a fabric to take in moisture. This will affect many other characteristics such as skin comfort, static build-up, shrinkage, stain removal, water repellency, and wrinkle recovery.
Batting	Cotton, wool, or synthetic fibre used for stuffing furniture and mattresses and for lining comforters.
Blend	A term applied to a yarn of a fabric that is made up of more than one fibre. In blended yarns, two or more different types of staple fibres are twisted or spun together to form the yarn. An example of a typical blended yarn or fabric is polyester/cotton.
Brocade	A rich jacquard-woven fabric with interwoven design of raised patterns, giving it an embossed appearance.
Chambray	A plain-woven fabric that can be made from cotton, silk, or manufactured fibres, but is most commonly cotton. It incorporates a coloured warp (often blue) and white filling yarns. Pronounced "sham-bray".
Chenille	A type of novelty yarn that has short, cut fibres protruding from it. Fabrics woven from this yarn have a plush or furry surface.
Chintz	Plain woven cotton fabric with a glaze finish giving a soft, lustrous appearance.
Damask	A reversible fabric, usually of cotton, linen, or silk, with a pattern woven into it; often used in upholstered furniture, window treatments, and bedding.
Dobby Weave	A decorative weave, usually geometric, that is woven into the fabric structure.
Egyptian Cotton	Cotton grown exclusively in Egypt and the longest fibre staple in the world. This means less linting, more durability, more lustre and a softer feel, frequently used to make sheets and other bedding materials due to its softness and high quality.
Fibre	The basic material, either natural or manufactured, which is twisted into yarns, and then used in the production of a fabric.

Gingham	A plain woven cotton and/or synthetic fabric. Most common patterns include checks, stripes or plaids. Available in a variety of colours and pastels against a white or ecru background.
Jacquard Weave	A weave structure that creates a variety of patterns, such as damasks, florals, and geometric. Jacquard weaves have a varying drape ability and durability depending on which fibres are used.
Knitted Fabrics	Fabrics formed by knitting. The interlocking of loops of yarn rather than interlacing two sets of yarn as in weaving.
Mercerization	Finish for cotton. This finish imparts luster to the cotton, increases its strength by nearly 25% and improves dye affinity, producing brighter shades than unmercerized cotton. It also enhances fabric hand and drape ability.
Microfiber Fabrics	<i>(also know as Microfibre)</i> Microfiber specifically refers to any synthetic fibre that weighs less than one denier per filament. To illustrate this nearly microscopic scale, consider that a filament of this fibre more than five miles long weighs less than one gram. Such filaments are much, much finer than a human hair. Because of the size of this fibre, many can be woven closely together to create a very tight, dense fabric. This density allows for more resistance to wear and staining. Because synthetic fibres are typically not as porous as natural fibres, further resistance to damage from dirt and spills is an added characteristic.
Muslin	A plain-weave fabric that may be bleached or unbleached. Usually used as under covering on upholstered pieces to tie in the stuffing and padding materials prior to putting on the final upholstery fabric.
Pattern	A design found in fabrics, often in multiple colours; in furniture, patterns are commonly found in upholstered items such as sofas and chairs.
Percalé	Smooth fabric - a smooth-textured closely woven cotton or polyester fabric used for bed sheets and clothing. It sometimes has a glazed finish.
Pile	Cut or uncut loops that stand up on the face of a fabric, making it thick and three-dimensional, in contrast to flat-woven cloth.
Pima Cotton	A generic term for extra long staple cotton.
Pique	A crisp medium-weight fabric, either knit or woven, with raised dobby designs. Pronounced 'pikay'.
Plain Weave	A weave structure that has horizontal and vertical threads woven in a simple over under pattern with no variations such as twists or knots.

Polyester	A manufactured fibre. It is second only to cotton in worldwide use. Polyester has high strength, excellent resiliency, and high abrasion resistance. Low absorbency allows the fibre to dry quickly.
Print	Surface having a pattern imposed with ink or dye by means of stencils, rollers, blocks, or screens.
Sateen Weave	<i>(in bedding)</i> A weave structure having single vertical threads woven over four to eight horizontal threads and under one horizontal thread. This weaving method gives the fabric a smooth finish and shows off shiny threads.
Satin Weave	<i>(in bedding)</i> A basic weave, characterized by long floats of yarn on the face of the fabric. The yarns are interlaced in such a manner that there is no definite, visible pattern of interlacing and, in this manner; a smooth and somewhat shiny surface effect is achieved.
Shearing	The process used to cut off surface fibres on fabrics or to cut off the wool from a sheep.
Rayon	A manufactured fibre composed of regenerated cellulose, derived from wood pulp, cotton linters, or other vegetable matter.
Terry Cloth	A typical uncut pile weave fabric. This fabric is formed by using two sets of warp yarns. One set of warp yarns is under very little tension; when the filling yarns are packed into place, these loose yards are pushed backward along with the filling yarns, and loops are formed.
Twill	A strong, durable fabric woven with filling threads crossing the wrap in a staggered pattern, producing an effect of parallel diagonal lines, which can be varied in size and shape.
Velour	A soft pile upholstery fabric, generally woven in a satin weave or plain weave, resulting in a short, thick pile.
Viscose	The most common type of rayon.
Warp	In woven fabric, the yarns that run lengthwise and are interwoven with the fill (weft) yarns.
Weft	In woven fabric, the filling yarns that run perpendicular to the warp yarns.