



HOUSING

Selecting draperies and curtains no. 9.509

by C. Birdsong, W. Shryack¹

Quick Facts...

A custom-made window treatment is a curtain or drapery made especially for a certain window by a specialist who measures, constructs and hangs the finished product.

A made-to-measure treatment is constructed by a specialist for a certain window, but the consumer provides the measurements and does the installation.

Ready-made curtains and draperies are limited in choice of fabric and styles and are available only in standard sizes.

Measure windows carefully; the final appearance of draperies and curtains depends on accurate measurements.

If you are thinking about changing a window treatment in your home or choosing draperies and curtains for a new home, becoming an “aware” shopper can give you the confidence to make the right choices.

Before shopping, ask yourself what the purpose is of the window treatment and what you want the draperies or curtains to do for the room.

Is privacy desired? Sheer glass curtains will give privacy plus light and see-through quality by day. Adding opaque draw draperies will provide privacy at night. In this combination, the glass curtains can act as the drapery lining.

Do you want to shut out an undesirable view? Again, the sheet glass curtain may be the answer to soften the view, yet allow for light entry.

Do you want to frame a view? In this case, unless privacy is needed at times, why use either curtains or draperies? Let the outdoors become a part of the decorating plan. Omit any type of window treatment. If privacy is required, either window shades or simple, unobstructive draw draperies hung to clear the sides of the window would do the job.

Is protection from sunlight needed? For this purpose, a lined draw drapery probably is the answer.

Are you concerned about conserving energy with the window treatment? If so, a window treatment is needed that traps air between itself and the window. In order to accomplish this, the curtains or draperies could extend from floor to ceiling or reach the sill or floor and be topped with a closed cornice board.

In either case, tack the curtains or draperies to the sides of the window frame or wall to help prevent air leakage. The denser the weave of the drapery fabric and the heavier the drapery, the more effective the treatment is in reducing the amount of air transmitted between inside and outside.

Regardless of its other purposes, the chosen drapery or curtain must enhance the attractiveness of the room. Window treatments are an important part of room decor and can make or break a well-planned decorating scheme.

What general atmosphere is desired in the room? For an informal feeling, consider textured, easy-care fabrics with simple treatment. For a room on the formal side, more elegant materials are appropriate.

Every line in a design gives the feeling of action. Each added line or design in a room will intensify the feeling of action that can build up to be quite overwhelming. If the room already is rather “active” with design, a window treatment of a plain fabric in a color that enhances the color plan is recommended.

Small rooms can give the illusion of spaciousness when draperies or curtains blend in color with the walls. On the other hand, a contrasting color or a bold design can result in an exciting window treatment for a room large enough to handle the feeling of action.

Your Skills or Someone Else's

Window decorating is one place in the furnishing venture where consumers can be do-it-yourselfers. Compare the possibilities of "custom-made", "made-to-measure", "ready-made" and "do-it-yourself" treatments. Consider services and quality as well as cost, especially if you want draperies. Making curtains is one thing, but making lined draperies is more complicated.

A custom-made treatment is a curtain or drapery made especially for a certain window. A specialist takes measurements, constructs the drapery or curtain and then installs it, making adjustments if any are necessary.

A custom-made window treatment usually is the most expensive, but a consumer gets considerable service and convenience. Also, there usually is an unlimited choice of materials and styles available.

A person buying custom-made draperies can expect these features of quality work: true grain line; all hems hand-stitched; bottom hem at least 3-1/2 inches deep and blind stitched; heading 3-1/2 to 4 inches deep with permanent finished buckram interlining; pleats sharp, even and securely stitched; design, if any, matched so that the motif runs straight across panels and appears in the same place on each panel; a generous width - at least 2½ times the width of the space to be covered.

A made-to-measure treatment, like custom-made, is a curtain or drapery made especially for a certain window, but the consumer provides the measurements. The consumer installs and makes any adjustments that might be necessary, unless they are due to construction error.

Made-to-measure curtains and draperies usually are less expensive than custom-made. Difference in cost is attributable to payment for fabric and construction only, since the consumer is responsible for accurate measurements and final installation.

A person can expect the same quality in made-to-measure window treatments as in custom-made. There usually is a good range of fabrics to choose from and, of course, made-to-measure can be done for any size, shape or style of window.

Ready-made curtains and draperies are limited in choice of fabrics and styles. It is possible to find just what is needed in this group of less expensive curtains and draperies. Prices depend on quality of fabric and construction. Look for these features in ready-mades: true grain; ample, straight hems with squared corners; stitching even and smooth with no puckering; designs matched; bottom width of drapery panels at least twice the width of pleated top.

Ready-mades come only in standard sizes. If windows are non-standard in shape, size or placement, a person may have to choose a custom treatment rather than a stock ready-made treatment.

Standard sizes in ready-mades are 63 inches long by 48, 72 and 96 inches in width per pair, and 84 inches long by 48, 72, 96, 120 and 144 inches in width per pair. Width generally is no problem, but it is impossible to buy a floor-to-ceiling drapery in ready-mades. If your windows don't cooperate, you still may have to alter to get the length of the draperies to correspond exactly to the window treatment.

Ready-mades are available unlined, fabric-lined and thermal-lined. There also is a good selection of valances, swags and other trims to provide allowance for creativity with windows rather than simply hanging two fabric panels over glass.

Do-it-yourself treatments usually are the least expensive curtains and draperies available. A person can spend the full amount budgeted for window treatments on high-quality fabric, because construction and installation costs are eliminated.

Draperies

Table 1 shows characteristics of different fibers that are best suited for particular needs. Labels on both drapery fabrics and ready-made draperies are required by law to give fiber content of the product. If the draperies are subjected to intense sunlight, carefully check the column "effect of sunlight." Solution-dyed means the fiber has built-in fade resistance.

The flammability factor of a fiber may be important. Fiberglass will not burn. Fabrics of either Verel or Saran will not support combustion.

Fabric construction is important, too. Fabrics that are firm and closely woven are more durable, more sun resistant and admit less heat and cold than loosely woven ones.

Linings

Linings are optional, but worth considering in a new drapery purchase. If the drapery is anything other than a sheer or casement, a lining fabric can be an advantage. Linings do more than add to the cost of the drapery. They help draperies hang more smoothly with deeper folds, add a measure of insulation to the window treatment, protect the drapery fabric from sun damage, and make the draperies more opaque.

Some drapery fabrics have a "self-lining" that consists of a satin face woven on the back of the fabric. This provides a smooth, opaque appearance.

Important in the self-lining category is a new acrylic-foam-backed drapery. The backing is a thin, aerated acrylic coating that forms a barrier against light and, to some extent, against outside noises and can air around the window. It also adds body and drapability and can be applied to most fabrics. The kind of face fabric determines whether the acrylic-backed drapery should be washed or dry-cleaned.

Insulative lining is available in several types:

1. plastic or vinyl, which may be either clear or opaque and serves mainly as a barrier to air and moisture,
2. fabric coated with vinyl,
3. silver-backed fabric, which is particularly valuable in reflecting the sun's rays as well as serving as a barrier to air and moisture, and
4. a foam-backed fabric, which has the added benefit of increased thermal performance and acoustical insulation.

Remember when choosing draperies that they also are seen from outside the house. Here, lining can give all the windows a uniform appearance. So before deciding to save a few dollars, take another look at the list of assets for lined draperies.

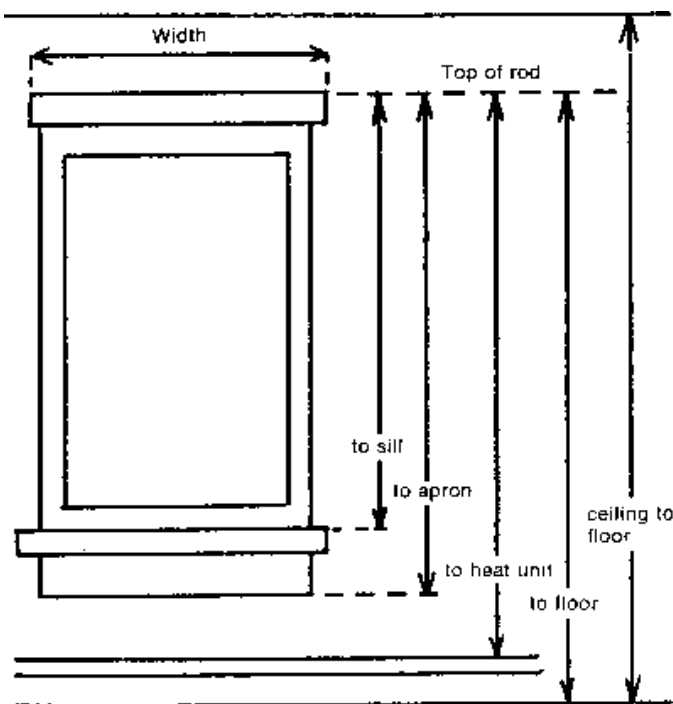


Figure 1: Measuring for draperies or curtains.

Figuring Yardage

Draperies.

Measure windows carefully; the final appearance of draperies depends on accurate measurements. Have rods in place before you measure, or know exactly where they will be positioned. No two windows are alike, so measure each window by using a steel tape or yard stick (not a cloth tape because it might stretch). As you measure, make sketches of the windows and fill in the dimensions, double-check for accuracy.

To figure fabric length, measure from the top of the rod to the floor, or to the bottom of the window apron, or to the sill, or to a structural point, such as a heat unit. (See Figure 1.) Never extend a drapery over a heat unit as it impairs

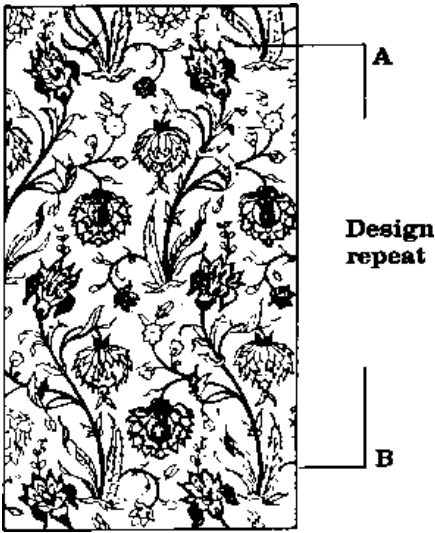


Figure 2. A design repeat.

heat circulation and could be a fire hazard. Furthermore, concentrated heat can cause deterioration of some fabrics.

To figure fabric width, measure between rod brackets, adding an extra 12 inches for center overlap and returns (the space the rod projects from the wall). Draperies should be at least twice the width of the space to be covered and draw draperies should be $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the space.

When you buy ready-made draperies, the width listed is the finished width of the pleated top. Draperies usually are available in several lengths and widths. Consumers who cannot find draperies to fit their windows may buy larger ones to allow for alterations. Extra fullness gives added attractiveness, but skimpy draperies are not acceptable.

To figure fabric needed for making draperies, add $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches each for top and bottom hems for a total of 7 inches, and 3 inches for side hems, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches each.

If the fabric has a design allow for matching. To do this, measure the distance from the top of one design to the top of the next identical design. This is called the design repeat. (See Figure 2.) This measurement should be evenly divisible into the required drapery length.

Example: If the design repeat occurs every 8 inches and the total amount of material needed for a drapery is 101 inches including hems, add 3 inches to 101 to make 104 inches. Divide 104 inches by 8 inches to get 13. You will have 13 design repeats for each drapery panel. If you left the material at 101 inches, the repeat would not be evenly spaced and the finished draperies would not be matched.

If you plan carefully, you can have a continuous repeat of design in all of the draperies. The design must be on grain or printed straight with the weave. This is an important feature to check before buying either drapery fabric or ready-made draperies.

Curtains.

Ready-made curtains and curtain fabrics are required by law to list fiber content. Information on what fiber is best for certain needs is in Table 1. Fibers resistant to sunlight deterioration should be selected if curtains are hung in sunny windows.

Before purchasing or making curtains, take accurate measurements of the windows to be curtained. Follow the measuring instructions given for draperies. The following guidelines will help to select curtains of the correct size:

- Tailored straight curtains (glass curtains)--total width should measure two and one-half to three times the width of the window.
- Criss-cross curtains--each panel should be twice the window width.
- Ruffled curtains--each panel should be the full width of the curtain rod.

The length should be to the sill, bottom of apron, floor, or to a structural point, such as a heating unit.

Care

Special care should be given to draperies. Clean fabric has a longer life because soil deteriorates fibers. Vacuum periodically to keep dust from accumulating. Obtain cleaning instructions at the time the draperies or the drapery fabrics are purchased. Draperies, especially lined ones, should be dry cleaned. Washing lined draperies may cause uneven shrinkage and puckering.

Curtains should be washed frequently. Embedded dust and soil, when acted on by sunlight and/or heat, can cause fabric deterioration. Note and save for future use any care instructions that are attached to the curtains or curtain fabric you select. Most curtain fabrics are washable, and synthetics usually are easy to care for (quick drying with little or no ironing), but follow care instructions explicitly.

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Table 1: Drapery and curtain fabric fibers and their characteristics.

Generic Item	*Trade Name	Physical Characteristics	Heat Resistance	Fire Resistance	Abrasion Resistance	Durability	Effect of Sunlight	Care
Cotton: natural fiber	Cotton	Drapes well	Excellent	Poor	Good	Good	Fade resistance fair	Machine and hand wash; need to iron unless drip-dry or no-iron finish
Acetate; Solution-dyed acetate	Celanese Chromspun	Soft, lustrous, drapes well	Loses strength	Fair	Fair	Fair to good depending on construction	Fade resistance excellent in solution dyes; average for regular acetate	Dry clean, usually; iron
Tri-acetate	Arnel							
Acrylic	Acrilan	Soft hand, drapes well	Highly susceptible to heat-- iron at low heat	Does not support combustion	Fair	Excellent	Very little effect; will darken after long exposure	Wash as directed or dry clean; iron at low temperature
Modacrylic	Orlon Verel							
Glass fiber	401 fiberglas Varitex (texturized)	Weighty fabric; translucent, lustrous: drapes well	Excellent	Fireproof	Fair	Excellent	None	Wash as directed or dry clean; do not iron
Nylon	Antron Caprolan Enka (loft)	Soft hand; adaptable to both sheers and heavy fabrics	Melts at 480°F	Melts before burning	Excellent	Very strong	Is affected; loses strength from exposure	Wash as directed or dry clean
Polyester	Dacron Fortrel Kodel Trevira	Drapes well; wrinkle resistant; wool-like hand	Melts at 480°F	Melts before burning	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent resistance; can lose strength after long exposure	Wash as directed; holds creases when wet; needs little ironing
Rayon; Solution-dyed rayon	Enkrome Fibre Coloray	Drapes well	Loses strength at 450°F; decomposes above 500°F	Burns relatively fast; depends on construction	Fair	Fair	Fade resistance average; excellent for solution dyes	Hand wash or dry clean
Saran; Solution-dyed saran	Enjay	Drapes well; soft, sturdy hand	Melts above 340°F	Does not support combustion	Excellent	Excellent	Unaffected	Wash in water under 140°F or dry clean

• Only a limited number of each is listed-- there are many more of equal importance. No criticism is implied of similar products not named.