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Sheets and Pillowcases – Selection, Use and Care
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Evelyn Stout, Cornell Extension
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Evelyn Stout

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SHEETS *and* PILLOWCASES

selection, use, and care

Evelyn Stout

PART I. SELECTION OF SHEETS AND PILLOWCASES

So you are interested in choosing sheets for yourself, your family, or as a gift! If you are buying sheets for the first time, or if you have not bought sheets in several years, you may be surprised at what the market offers you. Sheets are no longer routine household fabrics. They have now become fashion items, as you will see if you look at the ads in your magazines and newspapers. You may find yourself bewildered by the great variety of fibers, sizes, qualities, colors, decorative features, and styles. This bulletin is designed to give the information you need to make a wise purchase.

What about price?

Perhaps the first question homemakers ask is about price. Prices of sheets vary almost as widely as their types. Ordinary white or colored, medium-weight, cotton muslin sheets were selling in upstate New York in 1960 at \$1.89 to \$2.69 each for twin bed size (72 x 108 inches), while 200 thread count percales were selling for about \$7 per sheet, with a varied range of prices between. Double bed sizes cost a little more than single bed sizes. Embroidered, hemstitched, color-piped hems and other such decorative detail are more expensive than plain-hemmed sheets. Dacron-cotton (65-35 per cent) sheets were offered by a New York City department store at \$13.95 and \$16.95, respectively, for single and double bed sheets.

Most people buy ordinary styles and sizes in white cotton muslin and percale sheets, which are called "staple" sheets or "domestic staple" goods. Regular sizes in staple cotton sheets and in a few popular colors are the least expensive offered. The price increases with the use of other fibers, special colors, prints, various other types of decorative detail, and extra large sizes.

You need to decide what features you consider essential and what you can afford to pay; then choose from the variety offered in that price range. Few if any stores are able to carry a complete inventory of the many different types, sizes, colors, and styles in sheets. But in the large cities, by shopping among the stores, you should be able to locate any type or color you want.

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What varieties are offered on the retail market?

Muslin and percale cotton sheets in different qualities and sizes are offered in nearly all department stores, in mail order houses, and in some general stores. In September 1953, the first woven nylon sheets appeared on the market, and within a few months nylon tricot sheets made their debut. Dacron-cotton sheets first appeared in stores in early 1960. All-rayon and rayon-cotton sheets may soon be offered for sale. Resin-finished cotton "wash-and-use" sheets are now on the market in several brands. Linen sheets can still be purchased in some stores and can be ordered through others. They are not popular in the United States because they are expensive, wrinkle badly, and feel somewhat clammy in cold or damp weather. They are much used in Europe, however. A rainbow of plain-colored and decorated sheets further increases your choice.

Sheets are available in regular flat styles or with mitered-stitched corners. The latter are called "fitted" or "contour" sheets. You can buy contour sheets mitered at all four corners to fit snugly on the mattress for use as bottom sheets. Contour-style upper sheets are mitered at the lower corners only and have extra fullness at the bottom for foot room.

What does the label tell you?

The labels on the sheets you examine may mean much or little as buying aids. By federal law, which became effective in March 1960, the fiber content of sheets must now be stated. But other than fiber content, sometimes only the brand name and sheet size (length and width) are given. If you have had no experience with a particular brand, the brand label is of little help.

Sometimes very complete information is given. Labels may contain data on torn size, thread count, breaking strength, weight, shrinkage, quality ratings such as "first," "second," "irregular," or "run-of-the-mill," denier, gage, wales, courses, and colorfastness.

What do these terms mean?

No one of the above terms used alone tells you much. But several together can tell you quite a lot about the sheets you are examining. They can be important indications of the serviceability you can expect.

Fiber content shows the percentage (in amounts over 5 per cent) of all fibers used in the sheet, for example "100% cotton," "all rayon," or "Dacron polyester fiber 65% Pima cotton 35%." It is especially important to know fiber content if heat-sensitive fibers such as nylon, acetate, Dacron, Orlon, and Kodel are included, because of their influence on care.

Torn size refers to the size of the sheet before hemming and the way in which it was removed from the bolt of sheeting. Since the sheet size on flat sheets always refers to the unhemmed size, the finished length will be reduced by the amount turned under and in for hems. Hem sizes vary in different brands of sheets and may vary at the top and bottom of a sheet.

Sheeting may be torn from the bolt on a straight (crosswise) yarn from selvage to selvage; such ends will always be straight when properly washed, ironed, and folded. Sheets that do not specify "torn" size were probably cut from the bolt. If they were cut off-grain, their ends will never be straight. Examine cut sheets carefully at both ends for straightness of the grain.

Thread count refers to the number of yarns per inch in the lengthwise (warp) and crosswise (filling) directions. When both figures are stated the number of warp yarns is given first. When the two numbers are the same, the count may be described as "square." For example, "200 square" means 100 yarns per inch both ways. The tendency now is to give a total for warp and filling yarns per inch but not to specify the count in either direction.

The more nearly the count is balanced—that is, the nearer it is to being the same in both directions—the better the service that you may expect. If thread count is not given, you may judge the balance to some extent by observing whether the yarns seem to be the same size and the spaces between yarns the same size in both directions. To do this, hold a single thickness of sheet up to a window or to the light so that the weave is silhouetted.

Breaking strength (warp and filling) refers to the pull, in actual pounds, which is required to tear or break an inch-wide area of the sheet. Since sheets undergo considerable strain in being pulled taut on the bed, in use, and in laundering, it is important to have a high breaking strength. There is tension and strain in both warp and filling directions on a sheet, so both should be strong.

Weight of the sheeting fabric (stated in ounces per square yard) is an important factor in serviceability. It affects durability, comfort, and how well the bed stays made. Too light-weight a sheet will not wear well and too heavy a sheet is hard to handle in laundering.

Sizing is the term for starch and other materials used to give the sheet a smooth finish. Sizing is removed in the first washing. A little sizing does no harm but sometimes a great amount is used to cover up a poor fabric. Too much sizing, when washed out, may leave the sheet limp and thin or porous.

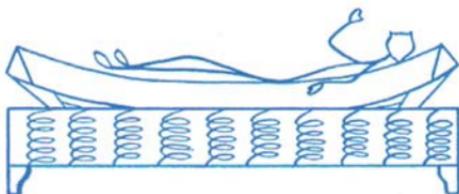
The percentage of sizing is not often stated. But you can tell if the sheet has excessive sizing by grasping a corner of the sheet in each hand and rubbing the folds together. If a considerable quantity of white, powdery substance falls from it, it is probably over sized.

Shrinkage. Information about shrinkage is sometimes given on the label. Sometimes the maximum amount of shrinkage which will occur is stated, with a guarantee by the manufacturer that the amount will not be exceeded. Sometimes a label may say "pre-shrunk" with no indication of how much shrinkage may still occur, or it may say "fully pre-shrunk."

Flat cotton sheets and sheeting sold by the yard are never pre-shrunk, so shrinkage will be considerable. It is not uncommon for a 108-inch cotton sheet

(torn, unhemmed size) to shrink 5 inches or more. This will mean only a 98-inch sheet after it is hemmed and laundered, and still less if it has an extra-wide hem at one end or wide hems at both ends. It's a good plan to buy sheets a little longer than you need to fit the bed; otherwise the sheets may be too short after they are washed.

Contour sheets, although always pre-shrunk, may not be fully pre-shrunk. It is very important that contour sheets fit the mattress exactly right. A contour sheet that is too big will not stay in place well, and a too short sheet will make your bed (and you) look like this:



First-quality, *seconds*, *irregulars*, and *run-of-the-mill* refer to yarn quality and to weaving imperfections. A first-quality or standard sheet has even, good-quality yarns, and is practically free from weaving imperfections, with every filling yarn running unbroken from selvage to selvage.

Seconds and irregulars contain some weaving imperfections and imperfect yarns. Open out such sheets and locate the imperfections to see if they are of a kind or in places that will affect durability. The price for seconds and irregulars should be less than for first-quality sheets.

Some manufacturers use their company brand name for first-quality sheets and sell seconds under another brand name, or unbranded.

Run-of-the-mill refers to sheets that are sold ungraded from the mill. They should be examined individually. Some may prove to be first-quality sheets, and thus good buys, while others may be too poor to class as seconds. The buyer takes the risk. These sheets should sell at a lower price than first-quality sheets.

Denier and *gauge* are terms used to describe knitted goods, and have the same meaning when applied to sheets as when applied to hosiery. Denier refers to the weight of the yarn used. The lower the denier the lighter the weight. Gauge means the number of rows of loops per $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (crosswise) of the knitted fabric. The weight of a knitted sheet is determined by denier and gauge and will affect its serviceability as does the weight of the woven sheets.

Wales are the vertical series of loops visible on one side (usually the right side) of most knitted fabrics, and *courses* are the horizontal ridges on the other side.

Are sheets standardized?

A number of organizations have tried for years to establish minimum standards for sheets. As a result of their efforts, as well as that of interested individuals, the American Standards Association adopted standards for certain kinds of sheets in the 1960 "L22 Standard Requirements for Home Furnishing Textile Fabrics." The ASA standards are entirely voluntary; those manufacturers who agree to use them may label their products in accordance with ASA suggestions and may say that the product meets or exceeds ASA standards.

ASA minimum standards have been established for bleached cotton, colored sheets (presumably cotton), and for knitted nylon sheets and pillowcases. The standards are established on the basis of a series of requirements for a specific sheet type. Sheets that do not conform to all requirements may not have a type stated on the label.

The ASA has specified four types for bleached cotton and colored woven sheets as follows: Type 200 combed percale, Type 180 combed or carded percale, Type 140 heavy-weight muslin, and Type 128 medium-weight muslin. Table 1 lists the minimum requirements for each type.

Table 1. American Standards Association Specifications for Cotton Sheets and Pillowcases^{1,2}

	Type 200 combed yarn	Type 180 combed or carded yarn	Type 140 carded yarn	Type 128 carded yarn
Combed thread count warp and filling (per inch square)	200	180	140	128
Warp breaking strength (pounds)	60	60	70	55
Filling breaking strength (pounds)	60	60	70	55
Maximum added sizing (per cent)	1	2	4	6
Weight (ounces per square yard)	3.6	3.6	4.6	4.0

¹ All standards are minimum specifications with the exception of sizing which is maximum.

² Reproduced by permission from ASL22, American Standard Performance Requirements for Textile Fabrics, Volume 1, published (1960) by the American Standards Association, Inc., page 137.

In addition to these requirements, colored woven flat sheets may not shrink or stretch more than 6 per cent in the warp and 5 per cent in the filling directions. Fitted sheets may not change more than 2.5 per cent in either direction and still meet ASA specifications. No shrinkage standards are given for white cotton sheets. There are colorfastness requirements for colored sheets. Hems of woven sheets must be stitched with at least 14 stitches per inch.

Although nylon sheets are carried by relatively few stores, ASA standards list three types of nylon knitted sheets as Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3. Type 1 specifies a total of 100 wales and courses per inch, Type 2 specifies 88, and Type 3 specifies 78. Other requirements are the same for all three types. Maximum shrinkage is stated as 3.5 per cent in each direction, dry bursting strength as 100 pounds, and wet bursting strength as 75 pounds.

Since the L22 standards have been extended to cover all fibers, it may be assumed that the specifications for woven sheeting fabrics will apply to woven sheets made of fibers other than cotton, and that the specifications for knitted nylon also will apply to sheeting of other knitted fibers.

Colored and decorative cotton sheets are not usually offered in all types.

What do these standards mean to you?

Sheets that conform to ASA standards vary in their characteristics according to type, to the fibers of which they are made, and to whether they are woven or knitted.

A good quality muslin sheeting is strong, sturdy, and durable. Type 140 muslin has fine, fairly even yarns and is smooth and firm. Type 128 muslin is lighter in weight and less firm than Type 140, but is equally smooth. Muslin sheets become softer with use and laundering, and Type 128 may seem quite thin as it gets old. Both Type 140 and Type 128 muslin sheets tend to be more durable than either type of percale sheets.

Percal sheeting is assumed to be of longer fiber cotton than muslin, and yarns are finer and more even. Percale is firm and smoother, although lighter in weight, than the muslins. Type 200 is the most luxurious of the cotton sheets. Many people prefer percale sheets to muslin because of their firm, smooth texture. Percale sheets are usually more expensive than muslin, ranging from only a few cents higher per sheet to two or three times as much. Percale will not withstand vigorous laundering methods as well as heavy muslin. If laundry is sent out and paid for by the pound, however, the bill for laundering heavy muslin sheets will be higher than a bill for the same size and number of percale or Type 128 muslin sheets.

Knitted sheets are more pliable than woven sheets. They may stretch in use between washings. The ASA strength requirements should insure durability of sheets that are made to conform to the standards.

A colored sheet that meets or exceeds ASA colorfastness standards can be expected to maintain its color satisfactorily in washing, but the color may change with continued exposure to sunlight.

Contour sheets are available in both muslin and percale and in knitted fabrics.

What about other sheets on the market?

A few years ago a great many sheet manufacturers labeled their sheets with data on thread count, breaking strength, amount of sizing, maximum shrinkage, and other information of concern to consumers. This often included a statement of type. Most of the sheets now on the market are not labeled as to type. ASA standards are perhaps too new for us to be seeing results as yet.

A survey of area stores in spring and fall 1960 revealed that although many brands of sheets carry thread count information, most do not now specify type.

If the thread count meets or exceeds a type specification, it *can not* be assumed that other corresponding minimum standards have been met *unless* the type is stated.

Consumers should demand ASA standard sheets and check the labels for the statements of type. Instructions for care of all sheets other than cotton also should be demanded.

A recent market survey made by a consumer organization revealed that many cotton sheets with the same labeled length varied by several inches, even within the same brand. This was true of contour as well as flat sheets. Consumers are advised to buy only with the understanding that sheets may be returned if they are shorter than the stated measurements (allowing for the turn under for hems). Then the newly purchased sheets should be measured and those that are not reasonably close to the stated length and width measurements should be returned to the store where purchased.

Dacron-cotton sheets are too new for information on their performance in use to be available. Since most consumers are familiar with Dacron-cotton blouses, shirts, slips, or other garments, they can anticipate what to expect in care, appearance, and durability.

The resins used in producing no-iron cotton sheets may change the texture considerably. If you like the smooth feel of well ironed sheets you may wish to try a pair of the no-iron sheets before you invest heavily. A number of resin finishes reduce the wear-life of cotton fabrics, and most of them gradually disappear with use and laundering. Some should not be bleached.

What size sheets will fit your bed?

Mattresses have been pretty well standardized in size. Widths are for cot or studio couch, single or twin, three-quarter, and double bed sizes. Lengths, except for part-size (children's) beds are 74 inches for the usual length mattress, and 80 inches for the "king-size" or extra-long mattress. Sheets are designed to fit standard mattress sizes.

The following table will guide you in choosing the correct sheet size:

Table 2. Sheet Sizes to Fit Various Standard Mattress Sizes

Type of bed	Bed width	Bed length	Sheet width	Sheet length
Cot or studio couch	30"	74"	54"	99" or 108"
Single or twin	39"	74"	63" or 72"	99" or 108"
Three-quarter	48"	74"	72"	99" or 108"
Double	54"	74"	81" or 90"	99" or 108"
King-size	Same as any above	80"	Same as for bed width above	112" or more

Since foam rubber mattresses are thinner than other mattresses, you may satisfactorily use sheets of somewhat smaller dimensions. Contour sheets are made in special sizes to fit foam rubber, king-size, and crib mattresses.

Not all mattresses are standard in length, width, and thickness, so you may wish to determine for yourself the satisfactory sheet length for your beds. Following are instructions for determining length for flat sheets:

- (1) Measure and record the length of the mattress,
- (2) Measure the thickness of the mattress and multiply by 2, then
- (3) Add this figure to the figure for mattress length.
- (4) Add 27 inches to allow for tuck-in at head and foot, hem allowances, and shrinkage.

The total is the length sheet needed for the mattress measured, and is the length figure you will look for on sheet labels.

To determine width for flat sheets:

- (1) Measure and record the width of the mattress,
- (2) Measure the thickness of the mattress and multiply by 2, then
- (3) Add this figure to the figure for mattress width.
- (4) Add 12 to 16 inches for tuck-in under the sides of the mattress.

The total is the width sheet needed for the mattress measured and is the width figure you will look for on sheet labels.

What details of finish should you look for?

Hems. Hems are usually 2 to 4 inches wide at the top of the sheet, and 1 to 1½ inches wide at the bottom. Some sheets have the same size hems at top and bottom—often 2 inches wide.

The hem should be evenly turned, firmly stitched, well finished at the ends, and should run on a straight line parallel to the filling yarns. The 14 machine stitches per inch specified in the ASA standards is a fairly short stitch. Stitching should look the same on both sides of the hem.

The ends of the hem may be finished by a stitching which continues from the hem up along the selvage edge to the top where it may be fastened or back-stitched to the hem stitching, or blanket-stitched to close the hem fold. All are satisfactory if correctly done.

Hemsitche hems are decorative, but the hemstitching often wears out before the sheet. Examine hemstitched hems and applied hems of different color, design, or fabric to see that they are cut straight on the grain of the material and are applied to the sheet in a straight line parallel to the filling yarns.

Color. Examine the labels of colored sheets, color-trimmed sheets, or printed or color-woven patterns for guarantees that they are colorfast to laundering or that they meet ASA color standards. Otherwise your sheets may soon look dingy and ugly, and you may want to discard them long before they are worn

out. If you plan to use sheets for curtains, draperies, bedspreads, and such uses, they will need to be guaranteed light-fast also.

Be sure that individually packaged colored sheets and pillowcases match in color. You will need to examine them in natural daylight. Stores sometimes stock sheets made by one manufacturer and pillowcases made by another, with apparently no attempt to match colors exactly.

Selvages. Selvages are the heavy $\frac{3}{8}$ - to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-wide edges along the sides of the sheet. Extra yarns are added in weaving to make the edges stronger. Selvages should be smooth, flat, even, and firmly woven, with no ragged, loose, or broken places. They must be strong and wide enough to hold the other yarns securely. Avoid buying sheets with curled selvages. A selvage that curls probably was not woven with even tension throughout, or it may not have been woven at the same tension as the body of the sheet. In either case, it may not give satisfactory service.

You may find it worthwhile to keep a record of the kinds of sheets you buy and the dates you purchased them. It is easy to print the purchase date on the inside of the hem with permanent indelible ink. The record, together with the experience you gain in use of the sheets, will help you in buying sheets another time.

What about pillowcases?

The same factors apply when you choose pillowcases as when you choose sheets. Pillowcases should measure 2 inches larger in circumference (distance around) than the pillows they are to fit, and should be 6 inches longer, hemmed. This shows how to measure the circumference of a pillow.



Pillowcases are usually made from sheeting woven in tubular form rather than flat, thus requiring no side seams. Pillow tubing is available in several widths. You will need to check the size of your own pillows, then choose pillowcases according to those measurements, to insure proper fit. A pillowcase that is too large does not look neat on the bed, and allows the pillow to slide around inside when the sleeper moves about. Pillowcases that are too small are more

difficult to put on the pillows, and may make the pillow wrinkle or double-up in spots. A pillowcase that is too small makes the pillow seem firmer and fatter than it is without the case.

PART II. CARE OF SHEETS AND PILLOWCASES

The life of a sheet depends as much on the care it receives as on the correct choice in the first place. Some of the important factors that affect wear are: how you make and unmake your beds, how the sheets are laundered, when they are repaired, and how they are used.

What care should be taken in making and unmaking your beds?

Bedding should be loosened all around from under the mattress before it is taken off the bed. *Never* yank sheets to loosen them from under the mattress nor to loosen them from several layers of other bedding which you have taken off together. Sheets may tear with such treatment while they are still quite serviceable.

As you remove sheets from the bed, watch for any needed repairs and make them before the sheets are washed.

Check bedsprings occasionally to see that there are no rough edges and no spring ends protruding where they may catch and tear the sheets as they are tucked under or removed. If you find places that need repair, fix them immediately. Carpentry may be necessary. Often rough edges may be covered with tape or wound with strips of cloth. Ends of springs not enclosed in fabric may be bent down and away from the spring surface with pliers. Several layers of cloth or heavy paper may be placed over worn spots in the springs, between springs and mattress. Parts of old mattress-pads, mattress-covers, or old quilts make good pads between springs and mattress.

Use mattress-pads on your beds to protect the mattress and also to protect your sheets from abrasion against the mattress. For maximum protection, the pad should cover the entire top surface of the mattress.

If you have sheets and beds of more than one size, be careful not to interchange the sheets. Bed making will be easier if sheets of different sizes can be easily identified in their place of storage. Storing different sizes in different piles helps. Some people find it helpful to use cotton tapes of different colors to distinguish sizes. A small piece of the tape is sewed to the inside on the corner of the bottom hem. A glance at the color identifies the size.

The bottom sheet will be neater and stay in place better if the corners are mitered as they are on a hospital bed. Sheets 99 inches long are too short to tuck in at both ends of a standard size mattress. They may be brought up even with the top edge of the mattress at the head of the bed, then tucked in well

and mitered at the foot of the bed. The lower sheet is pulled up tight at the head of the bed, and pillows hold the top edge of the sheet in place. Sheets 108 inches long can be tucked in at both ends of a standard-size mattress. All four corners may be mitered, if desired.

The top sheet should tuck in at the foot of the mattress and turn back 10 to 18 inches at the head over the other bedding. This protects the other bedding and prevents tugging at the hem of the sheet. Some people like the foot-end of their top sheet mitered too, but other people prefer it only partially mitered. This means that the last step in mitering a corner—tucking sheet in at the sides of the mattress—is omitted.

Change your beds frequently—at least one clean sheet a week—so that sheets do not become too soiled before they are laundered. In very warm, humid weather, a frequent fresh change of sheets adds greatly to your sleeping comfort. Change sheets often when someone in the family is sick in bed. Teach children to form the habit of going to bed clean. Remove your own makeup before you go to bed. This will help to prevent stains that require severe methods for removal.

Since most wear comes under the shoulders of the sleeper, regularly reverse your sheets (put the top hem at the foot of the bed and the bottom hem at the top of the bed) to insure longer, more even wear. If your sheets have the same size hems at both ends, you will not be concerned with this problem as reversal occurs anyway by chance. Sheets should be used half of their life with the top hem at the head of the bed, and half of the time with the bottom hem at the top of the bed, for maximum durability. It may be convenient to use the wide hem at the head for half the year, then use the narrow hems at the head for the rest of the year. Or you may work out a system of shorter or longer periods of time that is more convenient for you.

What care must you take in laundering?

White sheets are more likely to remain white if they are washed with white clothes only, and if neither clothes nor sheets are badly soiled. Any stains or spots not likely to come out in washing should be removed before washing, as soap and hot water may set them permanently. Removal treatment should be limited to the affected spot.

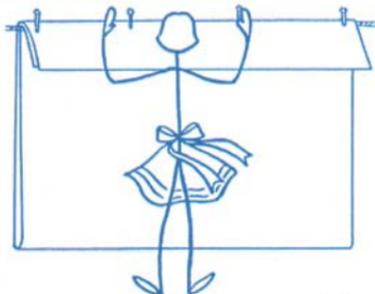
Use plenty of soap or synthetic detergent to wash your sheets, and rinse thoroughly. Thorough rinsing helps to keep sheets clean and bright. Hard water will do a better cleaning job if a softener is added, whether you use soap or a synthetic detergent. Add the softener before the soap or detergent.

Sunshine is the safest bleach for cotton. Strong bleaches damage cottons, causing them to weaken and wear out sooner than usual. If you need a bleach occasionally, use *no more* than the amount recommended on the bottle or package. Add it to the soapy water rather than in a soak period with water only, before the

wash. Bleach is less likely to damage cottons if used with a soapy solution. Resin-finished no-iron sheets may turn yellow if bleached with chlorine bleaches.

If you dry your sheets out-of-doors, hang them where they will not flap in the wind. Strong winds may whip out the corners of hems or break the selvage yarns.

Hang your sheets in different positions on the line occasionally. Pin frequently enough to avoid strain on small areas. A recommended method is to fold the sheet with the two hems together and place over the line hem-sides up, lapping the hems over the line about 12 inches.



You may prefer your sheets unironed, and unironed sheets do wear longer. If you iron yours, be careful to use the proper temperature. Even the mildest scorch greatly weakens cotton. Although we have often been advised not to iron creases in sheets as they supposedly wear out along the folds, this probably is not important.

Work out a folding system that suits your own storage space. You will save time and work if sheets are stored in such a way that you can identify different sizes, etc., without having to open out the sheet. A label taped to the shelf edge does the trick nicely if you keep sheets sorted in piles of the same size.

Be sure your sheets are thoroughly dry before you put them away. Otherwise, they may mildew if stored in a warm, dark place. Mildew weakens sheets, and often the stains can never be completely removed.

Get in the habit of placing newly-laundered sheets at the bottom of the pile when you store them. This will allow for automatic rotation in use. Sheets wear longer if rotated!

How should sheets of nylon and other heat-sensitive fibers be laundered?

Nylon sheets and those made of other heat-sensitive (thermoplastic) fibers may be washed in a machine or by hand. Water temperature must be kept at medium or lower in machine washing. The thermoplastic group includes sheets made entirely or in part of polyester fibers (Dacron and Kodol, for example), acrylics (Orlon, Acrilan), acetates and triacetates (acetate, Arnel, Celanese),

and other less well-known fibers. A good sudsy washing followed by thorough rinsing is as essential for these fibers as for cotton. It is particularly important to wash sheets of these types frequently enough to prevent real soiling.

Chlorine bleach is not usually effective on the heat-sensitive fibers; peroxide and sodium perborate sometimes seem little better. A dry, granular all-purpose bleach put up in a plastic packet that dissolves as a part of the action seems to be effective on Dacron-cotton combinations, and may improve whiteness of other fibers. "Optical" bleach (a type of dye rather than a bleach) may make sheets appear whiter when they are in sunlight.

Thermoplastic fiber sheets dry quickly. They may be drip-dried, or if precautions are taken to keep the heat low, they may be dried in a dryer. The dryer should be cool when the sheets are put in and the heat should be set at "low." The dryer should be stopped every few minutes to check on dryness of the sheets. They should be removed from the dryer as soon as dry, and folded at once to prevent wrinkling.

Sheets made of thermoplastic fibers should not be ironed as they soften or melt at fairly low ironing temperatures. One of their selling points is that they do not need to be ironed.

Although properly folded thermoplastic-fiber sheets take up less space on shelves than cotton sheets, they are more likely to slip and to unfold if moved or handled.

When should sheets be repaired?

Inspect your sheets occasionally for needed repairs by holding them up, unfolded, toward the light. A sheet is beyond repair if you can see many little splits or holes. If you can see thin places, repair them. Small thin places or small holes may be darned by hand or by back-and-forth machine stitching. Machine darning, like hand darning, should run not only across the worn spot but also in the other direction. A patch from a good area in another old sheet may be used to patch worn areas too large for darning.

A tear should be repaired at once; otherwise it will get worse in use or washing. You may need to back a three-cornered tear with a patch or paper while you stitch. If the edges of the tear are jagged, patching will be more satisfactory than darning.

As hemstitching wears out, and the hem tears free from the body of the sheet, you can make attractive repairs with rickrack. Cut the hemstitching down the center. This will leave a picot edge on the sheet and on the hem. Sew the rickrack points neatly along the edge of the sheet, just back of the picot edge. Do the same on the hem side, and your sheet will again be serviceable. This can be done easily with your sewing machine. Examine sheets to be sure they are worth it before you undertake this job.

Worn sheets may still have serviceable areas that can be used in other ways.

If the good area is large enough, the old sheet may be cut down to fit a child's bed or crib, or for under-slips for your pillows. Under-slips protect the pillows and make the outer pillowcases appear whiter. You can find many uses for soft, old sheets, from bandages to cleaning cloths for the family car.

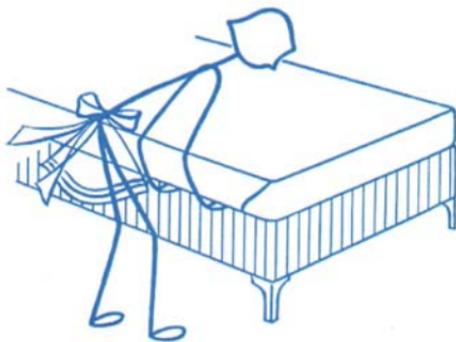
And pillowcases?

The same general care is required for pillowcases as for sheets, with this added caution: never use your pillowcases as laundry bags. They may be damaged by the severe strain put on them in such use. Also, they may be placed in damp or not-too-clean areas and pick up soil or stains that cannot be removed by ordinary washing methods.

Women wear out pillowcases faster than men do because of the abrasive effect of bobby pins and metal curlers. If you wish to protect your pillowcases, cover your curlers with a turban or scarf when you go to bed.

Hair oil and other dressings, cosmetics, and creams are somewhat difficult to remove from pillowcases. Be sure to shampoo frequently, and remove your makeup before going to bed.

And pillow fights are hard on pillowcases too!

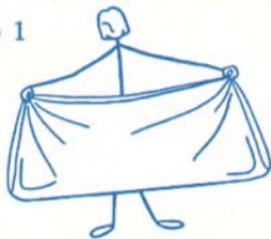


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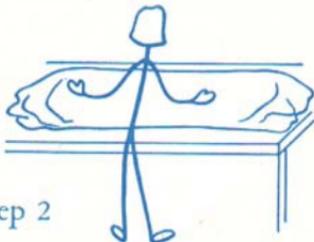
TO FOLD A CONTOUR SHEET

Contour sheets require special care in folding for storage. You will need a fairly large flat work surface. If you wish to iron contour sheets, do so after Step 3, 4, or 5.

Step 1

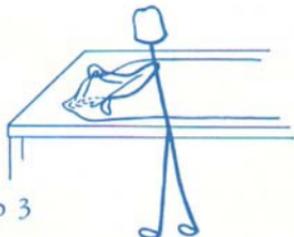


Fold the sheet in half lengthwise by bringing the selvage edges together up to, but not including, the corners.



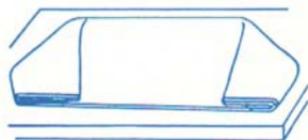
Step 2

Place the sheet on a flat table or bed surface with the selvage edges toward you.



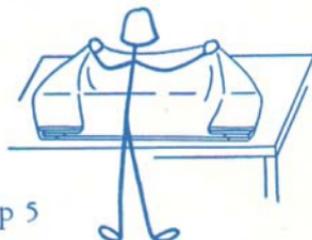
Step 3

With left hand, pick up extreme left end of sheet and with right hand push top corner pocket down into bottom corner pocket. Bring end held in left hand down to the selvage edges.



Step 4

If the sheet is contoured at all four corners, repeat Step 3 at the other end. The sheet will then look like this.



Step 5

Fold the sheet in half by bringing the center over to the selvage edges.



Step 6

Fold both ends to the middle, then fold in half again. You may fold as many more times as you wish.