



# THE THREAD

Unraveling the Mysteries of Fibers, Fabrics and Floor Coverings

## RAYON RUGS...

### “Difficult” Would Be The Diplomatic Term

A soft floor covering is generally described as either a “rug” or as “carpet” (“carpeting”), with some occasional overlap between the terms. Rugs are distinguished from carpet by the fact that they are not usually affixed to the floor in a permanent installation.

Because rayon is found more often as a rug fiber than as carpet, this article will focus on 100% rayon rugs. As you would expect, the majority of the comments and concerns mentioned here will also be true of rayon used in wall-to-wall carpet and rayon used as an accent fiber.

#### No Perfect Fibers

Many different fibers are used in the manufacturing of rugs. The most popular for many years have been nylon, olefin and wool. While none of them is perfect, each of these fibers has inherent qualities that make them suitable for use in floor coverings. Olefin, for example, is resistant to a wide range of stains. Wool is the benchmark for resiliency (the ability to recover from crushing). Nylon properties tend to fall somewhere

between wool and olefin, offering average stain resistance and moderate resiliency.

So, where does rayon fit into the mix?



#### One Fiber, Many Names!

In our experience, no other fiber shows up on labels under more different names than rayon. Some names are obvious. *Viscose* describes the most common process used to manufacture rayon. Others are more vague. *Faux Silk* is rayon. *Art Silk* (short for *artificial silk*) and *ART CYLK* are also rayon. At least one manufacturer uses a brand name, calling their rayon *Luxcelle*. Many different names, all the same fiber.

#### At Home In The Bath

Rayon has long been popular for one type of rug in particular: bath mats. Rayon is very soft under foot, it is extremely absorbent and – above all – it is inexpensive. For an item like a bath mat that gets very casual use and is replaced as often as every two or three years, rayon is a good fit.

The problems begin when rayon is transitioned into uses that are more demanding...like rayon rugs that receive daily traffic soils and stains.

#### Problems Abound

We think of rayon as cotton's poor relation. It's a cellulosic fiber, so it shares a few of cotton's better qualities (e.g., soft hand and resistance to static). But rayon is a *man-made* cellulosic, meaning some of its properties are quite different from cotton.

*Poor Strength.* Cotton actually gets stronger when it is wet. Rayon, however, loses strength. In fact, rayon can lose up to 50% of its tensile strength when it gets wet. This means that when rayon rugs are cleaned (either spot

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cleaning or overall cleaning), greater caution must be used.

*Shading.* Rayon is very lustrous, with the result that differences in pile orientation can mean areas that appear lighter or darker. This problem is often referred to as pile distortion. Wet shoes, a small spill or a pet accident can all result in this type of shading problem.

When a rayon rug needs spot cleaning, it can be complicated. Water-based cleaners tend to flatten the pile, causing noticeable distortion that can be VERY difficult to correct.

*Poor Resiliency.* Rayon is one of the least resilient of all fibers. Crushing and matting in traffic areas is very common. Complicating this situation is the fact that aggressive vacuuming (with a brush head) is **specifically recommended against** by

some manufacturers of rayon rugs.

*Poor Cleaning Results.* Generally speaking, rayon rugs are difficult to clean. As with any other fabric or floor covering, dry cleaning is simply not very effective on the range of stains and traffic soils that are most commonly found in the home. Wet cleaning, using appropriate detergents followed by thorough rinsing, is the most effective method...and also the most problematic for rayon rugs.

Normal wet cleaning procedures will inevitably cause flattening of the pile. This effect can be somewhat corrected by gently grooming the pile upright as it dries, but the overall look of the pile will never be "new" again.

### **Sound Familiar?**

Pile fabrics of the same fiber, whether floor coverings,

upholstery fabrics or vertical fabrics, tend to share similar characteristics.

The "sensitivities" of rayon in pile constructions such as chenille and velvet are well documented. For the most part, the potential problems, especially pile distortion and water-based cleaning issues, are exactly the same.

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