

How to purchase the perfect set of sheets.

When shopping for sheets, there are three terms you should understand. Weave, fiber, and thread count.

Weave:

Percale refers to the weave. It's the simple one thread over, one thread under weave and it's sometimes referred to as a plain weave. It's the weave my kids used to produce when I'd buy them little looms to keep them busy on long trips. They are usually woven of 100% cotton or a 50/50 poly/cotton blend. Percale sheets are cool, crisp, durable, breathable and as an added benefit, they tend to get softer with time.



A **twill** weave is similar to a simple weave but it produces a subtle diagonal pattern. It's most often used in flannel and brushed cotton sheets.

Sateen is a luxurious and soft weave obtained by weaving four warp threads (those running vertical) over and one waft thread (horizontal) under. Sheets woven with a sateen weave will feel silky to the touch and have soft sheen as opposed to the cool,

crisp finish that you'll find with a percale. Sateen weaves also produce a heavier, warmer sheet. It's important to note that the same weave that makes the sateen sheet soft and silky, also makes it more likely to pill and rip.

Jersey is yet another type of weave. Actually, that's not quite accurate. It's not really a weave at all. Jersey sheets are knitted. They are usually made from cotton, or polyester/cotton blend and they feel like your favorite t-shirt.

Fiber:

Cotton is widely considered the best fiber for sheets because it's affordable, durable, breathable and offers superior comfort.

However, all cottons are not created equal. Egyptian cotton has long been considered the finest cotton in the world with fibers up to 50% longer than standard cotton fibers. Pima cotton, sometimes sold under the trade name Supima, and produced in the southwestern region of the US is, according to some experts, virtually indistinguishable from Egyptian cotton. Because the longer fibers result in a product that is softer, stronger, more durable and doesn't pill, both Egyptian and Pima cotton command higher prices than standard cotton.



The one notable downside to cotton is its tendency to wrinkle. I have found however, that cotton sheets wrinkle less with each washing. Sometimes manufacturers will blend cotton with polyester. This provides a product that wrinkles less, but doesn't breathe quite as well.

Brushed cotton is 100% cotton, lightly brushed to provide a fluffier surface. **Flannel** is similar, but fluffier. The little pockets created by the fluff trap body heat and make flannel sheets very warm and cozy.



In recent years, I've seen an increase of microfiber sheets. **Microfiber** is a fiber made by spinning polyester into very fine threads. It's very soft to the touch, but because it's polyester, it doesn't breathe well and often results in a clammy sleep. Inexpensive microfiber tends to tear easily, but its pricier version wears well with little pilling.

Linen is a thread made from flax. It's expensive, and wrinkles badly, but it breathes well and is suited to all kinds of sleepers. Though it's very expensive and considered a luxury sheet, it gives a more lived-in, casual look to your bed. Go figure.

Thread Count:

Thread count is the number of warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) threads within 1 square inch. Several years ago, thread counts received a lot of marketing attention and consumers became obsessed with it. It is true that generally a higher thread count will result in a softer, more durable sheet. However, thread count is often manipulated and misunderstood.

As consumers demanded high thread counts, some manufacturers started twisting extra threads into the weft (horizontal) thread and claiming higher thread counts. Alternatively, they would twist two threads together and count each of them when calculating thread count. Neither of these did anything to make the sheets softer or more durable. It was simply a marketing gimmick designed to separate unsuspecting consumers from their hard earned dollars.



In fact, when it comes to cotton, there is a limit to the number of threads that can fit on a loom. Most high quality sheets will have a count between 400-600. Personally, I

prefer a thread count of 250-300. It's high enough to be soft and durable and low enough to remain cool and crisp.

So, in a week or two, when I pack the flannels sheets away, with a sachet of lavender tucked in the folds, what will replace them on my bed? These sheets from the Shabby Chic line at Target! They are the quintessential percale sheets, 100% cotton with a 250 thread count. They are crisp, beautiful, virtually indistinguishable from Grandma's sheets, all with a price tag that will make you smile.



These might be my go-to sheets, but when looking up the Target link, I stumbled upon these beauties. They are a cotton/linen blend in the Shabby Chic line! It's been a long time since I've been tempted to try sheets other than my favorite tried and true. If Target weren't 45 minutes away I might have them on my bed tonight! If you try them, let me know what you think!