

RETAILER RESOURCE

A BUYING GUIDE FOR COTTON SHEETS



Consumers already recognize that the natural properties of cotton make it soft, breathable, and naturally thermo-regulating¹ – an intuitive choice for comfortable bedding. **But what other crucial factors go into choosing cotton sheets as an option for your customer?**

In this guide, we outline key considerations – cotton variety, thread count, and fabric construction – as well as marketing resources for you as a retailer. Our goal with this guide is to equip you to make educated buying decisions and accurately communicate relevant benefits of cotton that matter to your market.

VARIETY OF COTTON

There are two varieties of cotton that are grown around the world, each with characteristics that are suitable for a range of products, including different cotton sheeting constructions. Cotton varieties are not specific to country of origin, but the type of soil and climate in different countries may dictate the variety of cotton that is able to be grown. In your search to buy or make the best cotton sheets, here's what you need to know:

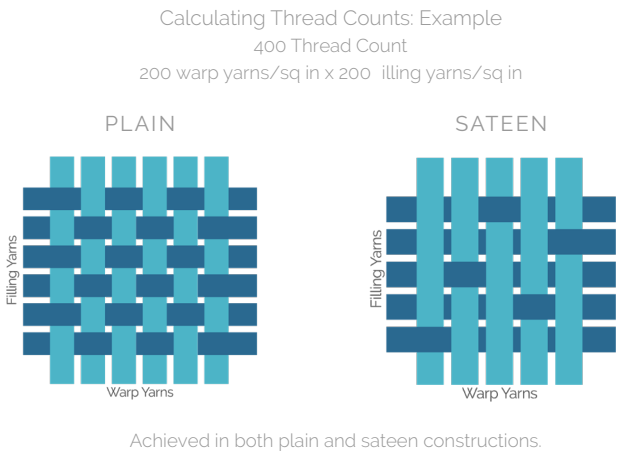
- **Upland** is the most common and widely used cotton. It can have short to long staple lengths.
- **Pima** is a fine, extra long staple (ELS) cotton grown in limited parts of the world. Supima® is a trademarked marketing program of U.S.-grown pima cotton.

"Staple" refers to the length of the cotton fiber. Longer staple lengths produce finer yarns. Finer yarns produce higher thread counts. These factors can contribute to softer sheets, but there are other factors to consider as well.

THREAD COUNT

Thread count is a measure of the total number of weaving yarns in a square inch of fabric. The higher the thread count, the tighter the fabric (when using the same yarn counts in warp and filling). The standard method for determining thread count is to add together the warp yarns per square inch and the filling yarns per square inch.

The maximum number of yarns that manufacturers are *typically able* to comfortably fit in one square inch is around 400. Thread counts exceeding 400 are likely woven with finer yarn counts or by inserting multiple yarns simultaneously during filling insertion. If two- or three-ply yarns are used in the filling, it is not permissible to count each plied yarn separately. Plied yarns can affect tensile strength, skewing and breathability. The best method to achieve higher thread counts is to insert multiple filling yarns in the same weave shed.



Thread count is directly related to fabric cover factor, which is the number of yarns of a given count you can weave in a given area. A high cover factor and high thread count may result in a stiffer fabric, which can lead to poor drape, harsher hand and lower tear strength.

Many equate higher thread counts with better quality; however, there are many other factors to consider such as fiber type, yarn spinning system, yarn count, fabric weight, fabric construction and finishing. Cotton sheets can be manufactured to optimize each one of these factors, resulting in sheeting with improved performance, aesthetics, hand, drape, breathability and durability.



FABRIC CONSTRUCTION

Cotton sheets are most commonly woven, though they can also be knit. However, there's more to construction than wovens and knits. Fiber type, yarn spinning system, thread/yarn count, fabric weight, fabric construction and finishing are all important factors to consider when making cotton sheets. Variations within these factors can ultimately affect how the sheet feels and performs.Cotton Incorporated's industry experts outline the most common fabric constructions and considerations for cotton sheeting to help you create the best sheet for your end consumer.

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A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO COTTON SHEETING

DURABILITY, QUALITY, AND OTHER TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

	Percale	Sateen	Flannel	Patterned	Knit
Design	Plain Weave	Satin Weave	Brushed Plain Weave, Twill Weave	Jacquards and Prints	Single Jersey
Cotton Fiber Type	Mostly 100% upland cotton, ELS cotton to optimize	Mostly long staple or ELS cotton	Mostly upland cotton, use of Pima cotton for enhanced softness	Upland, long and ELS cotton	Mostly 100% upland cotton, ELS cotton to optimize
Yarn Type	Carded and combed cotton yarns, ring and open end yarn along with some air jet yarn, combed cotton to optimize	Combed cotton ring spun yarn, some air jet yarns with the lower thread counts	Carded yarns, ring spun combed yarns to optimize, some open end yarn at lower price points	Combed ring spun, carded air jet cotton	Carded and combed cotton yarns, ring, open end, and air-jet yarn; Higher end with plied yarns to increase strength and reduce torque
Thread Count	180-200 carded yarns good; 220-320 combed yarns optimal	320-400 good; 400-600 optimal; 600-1000 artificially inflating the number of yarns by using plied yarns or multiple pick insertions	Not normally a factor or consideration in flannel sheets, but fabric weight is a factor and consideration	Varies according to weave design and choice of weight	Not applicable to knitted sheets
Weight	100-140 g/m ² (3-4 oz/yd ²) range or heavier when using higher thread counts	120-140 g/m ² (3.5-4.0 oz/yd ²) good; 140-155 g/m ² (4.0-5.5 oz/yd ²) optimal (Note: to keep weight down finer yarns must be used with high thread counts)	140 g/m ² (4 oz/yd ²) good; 170-200 g/m ² (5-6 oz/yd ²) optimal for added durability	Weight will vary according to design, heavier weights with jacquards	140 -180 grams/m ² (4.4-5.3 oz/yd ²)
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crisper hand• Good breathability• Good durability• Tends to wrinkle excessively with higher thread counts• Good for all-seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smooth silky-like hand• Must be sufficient thread count to prevent picking and snagging• Excessively high thread counts (800 and above) can be stiff and have less breathability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brushed for softness and warmth• Heavier weights provide additional warmth and may be less breathable• Lower weights have shorter life due to wear and washing• Solid colors and plaids maintain color best in heavier weights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smooth and lustrous hand• Prints tend to be more crisp with more colors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soft hand• Excellent breathability making it good for year round use• Good durability and long lasting• Less likely to wrinkle

MORE RESOURCES

FABRIC INSPIRATION

Whether you're seeking ideas for your suppliers or working internally to produce your own fabrics, Cotton Incorporated's FABRICAST™ library features what you need for cotton inspiration.

FABRICAST™ developments incorporate new yarns, interesting woven or knit fabric structures, and unique dyeing and finishing techniques – demonstrating the limitless possibilities of cotton for home textiles. Cotton Incorporated can provide swatches along with all the technical specifications to help you bring cotton ideas to life with your own global partners.

MARKETING INSPIRATION

Sleep wellness is a hot consumer topic – which means your customers are gaining greater awareness about the importance of getting a good night's rest. The inherent properties of cotton make it an ideal raw material to help your customers get the restful sleep¹ they want – it's soft, breathable, hypoallergenic² and naturally thermo-regulating¹. Cotton Incorporated can help you craft marketing messages to communicate these important attributes of cotton on product hangtags, packaging and websites.

SEAL OF COTTON TRADEMARK

Consumers are more likely to check fiber content labels on home textiles³, and you want them to be sure it's cotton. By licensing the Seal of Cotton trademark, you are able to visually communicate to consumers that your sheets contain 100% cotton.



MORE RESOURCES

COTTONWORKS™ TEXTILE ENCYCLOPEDIA

In this expansive resource, you will find definitions of useful textile terms relevant to the sheeting market, including:

- ASTM
- Cover Factor
- Extra Long Staple (ELS)
- Flannel
- Jersey
- Microfiber
- Odor Release
- Percale
- Pick Insertion
- Pilling
- Pima Cotton
- Plain Weave
- Sateen
- Thread Count
- Upland Cotton
- Yarn Count





For more information on cotton sheeting
or the home textile market, email us at
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Sources: ¹ Comfort Testing Research, April 2014. AAT Research. ² Cotton Incorporated 2019 clinical trials on Determination of the Irritating and Sensitizing Propensities of Mechanically Cleaned and Purified Cotton on Human Skin. ³ Cotton Incorporated's 2020 Home Textile research.