

# FIBER FACTS



## Rayon Rugs... Readily Ruined, but Still the Rage

We have written various articles over the years explaining the shortcomings of rayon. Despite our best efforts, rayon rugs remain extremely popular with designers and their clients. Undeterred, we bring you—again—our best information about the limitations of these products.

### What's in a Name?

For all practical purposes, the terms rayon and viscose are interchangeable. There are a handful of exceptions, but they are a tiny part of the total market. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says either name is acceptable.

What the FTC does not allow is rayon that is described under fanciful names that do not include either “rayon” or “viscose” in the description. A rug that is labeled “100% Bamboo Silk” is actually 100% rayon and 100% in violation of federal labeling laws. In fact, the FTC sued several major retailers for just this type of infraction in 2012... and the fines were over \$1.2 million.

Why might a retailer or manufacturer use the term “bamboo silk” instead of rayon? Natural fibers are as popular as ever and bamboo is thought of as both natural and sustainable. Silk is, of course, both natural and a luxury fiber. So, the misleading name really comes down to marketing sizzle (without the steak).

It seems that some will do almost anything to keep from calling their rugs “rayon.” No other fiber shows up under so many different names.



*Water spilled on a rayon rug was blotted with paper towel and then air dried. The resulting pile distortion (light spot) is very common in these rugs.*

Banana silk, faux silk and art silk are almost always rayon (rarely, a rug will be mercerized cotton). Luxcelle and Silkette are tradenames being used for rayon. Again, the names are confusing (and illegal) because the fiber content is not immediately recognizable.

### Problems Abound

As we've mentioned before, 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 by spot 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 appear lighter or darker. This problem is often referred to as pile distortion. Wet feet, 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, if not impossible, 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 and many carpet and rug cleaners will decline to do so. 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 common 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.

## **The Experts on Your Side**

Our network of fabric care experts stands ready to help! The professionals of the Fiber-Seal Fabric Care System are always happy to offer recommendations and suggestions on cleanability and long-term care for all types of upholstery and floor coverings.

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