

Upholstery Fabric Pilling

Pilling is known as loose strands or balls of fiber that form on the face of a piece of fabric. It is caused by friction on the surface of the fabric, and is considered an unsightly occurrence on furniture. Since all fabrics will pill to some extent, the possibility of it happening should not be a main concern when choosing an upholstery fabric and it is important to note that pilling is not a fabric defect or fault.

WHAT CAUSES PILLING?

Loose fibers have a natural tendency to move to the surface of a piece of fabric, where they are subject to friction, which causes them to twist together into small balls. Fibers that are still secured to the fabric are also twisted into the ball, so that the pill is secured to the surface of the material.

Friction is caused in the normal course of people using the furniture, rubbing against the surface of the fabric. Laundering also causes friction — washing machines agitate fabric, causing the surfaces to rub together.

Pilling is more noticeable on man-made fibers. This is mainly because natural fabrics shed loose fibers easily and less noticeably, while man-made fibers are notoriously strong, so the pills are anchored strongly to the fabric. Also, when a fabric is made from more than one fiber type, where one fiber is strong and one is weak (for example, poly/cotton) pilling will be more noticeable, because the weaker fiber wears and breaks, while the stronger fiber holds the pills to the cloth.

It's important to understand that fabrics consist of either long fibers or short fibers and, generally, short fibers — like cotton — are more likely to pill. There are more tiny ends (as opposed to one long, continuous fiber, like silk or linen) that can get tangled together and create pills, which usually happen when the fabric is rubbed or abraded somehow. Silk is a natural filament, with long fibers. You can unravel a silk cocoon and its one continuous fiber that runs 1,600 yards. On the flip side, synthetics like acrylic are more prone to pilling. Any fiber that doesn't tend to absorb water — like polyester or nylon — tends to pill.

IS PILLING A DEFECT?

It is important to note that pilling is not a fabric defect or fault. It can be compared to the shedding experienced when purchasing a new sweater or new carpet — think about the way newly installed carpet or a new sweater behaves, as there are constantly new loose fibers coming to the surface over the first few months of use. This is completely normal and will reduce once the excess fibers are gone.

Consumers are sometimes concerned that pilling means that the fabric is wearing away and disintegrating — this is not the case. Pilling is a normal occurrence caused by wear and tear, and does not affect the durability or functionality of the fabric. It is easily removable.

If you notice that your furniture is developing pills, don't be alarmed. It is easily remedied and does not mean your furniture is made of poor quality fabric.

The quickest and most cost effective approach is to use a battery operated pill shaver to remedy the situation. These small, cheap appliances are available in most sewing stores, or the sewing area of large department stores. A pumice stone pill remover or pill comb are also effective, and both perform the same task manually.

If pilling reoccurs, it can simply be shaved off again. This may occur several times, but the pilling will diminish and eventually cease once the excess fibers are removed.

BLUFISH