



Caring for Your Oriental Rugs

A genuine handknotted Oriental rug will last a very long time if you take a few precautions to protect it from premature wear and the most common kinds of damage. Common problems include water damage, moth damage, dog chews and cat scratching, pet stains, vacuum cleaner damage, chemical damage, sun damage, and uneven wear.

This page tries to answer the most frequently-asked questions about caring for Oriental rugs. See also our recommendations for [cleaning your rug](#). To download this information for yourself , family and friends, you may click here to [download](#) our free e-Book on Caring for Your Oriental Carpets and Rugs for PC only. Click here to download in [PDF format](#).

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Water Damage

Most varieties of Oriental rugs have wool pile, but many have cotton warp and weft (the warp is the foundation upon which knots are tied to create the pile; the weft runs over and under warp strings between rows of knots to strengthen the rug from side to side). This cotton foundation can be weakened, and

sometimes actually rotted, if the rug is wetted repeatedly and not properly dried.

A common cause of such damage occurs when potted plants are placed directly on a rug. The plant is watered regularly, the pot leaks, and the rug under the pot stays permanently damp. Within two or three weeks the foundation of the rug can become so weak that chunks can be torn from the affected area by hand. If you use planters near a rug, try to place them on a slim legged stool, or a caster-based support that lets you see under the pot and allows for ventilation. After watering the plant check to be sure the rug under it is completely dry.

Another form of water damage can affect rugs used in a basement or other area below grade level. If the basement floods the potential for damage is obvious. The rug must be removed quickly, properly cleaned, and allowed to dry completely. A more insidious form of damage can be caused by using a rug over a damp floor (as is often the case if the floor is cement). Even though the floor is not noticeably wet to the touch, there can be enough moisture to allow microorganisms to flourish in the material of the warp and weft and to degrade the strength of the rug's foundation.

A rug damaged in this way will often feel peculiarly stiff when manipulated. The rug will sometimes be so stiff it will be difficult to roll, and if you listen carefully to the back of the carpet when it is creased or folded, you can often hear the cracks and popping noises made by breaking warp and weft fibers.

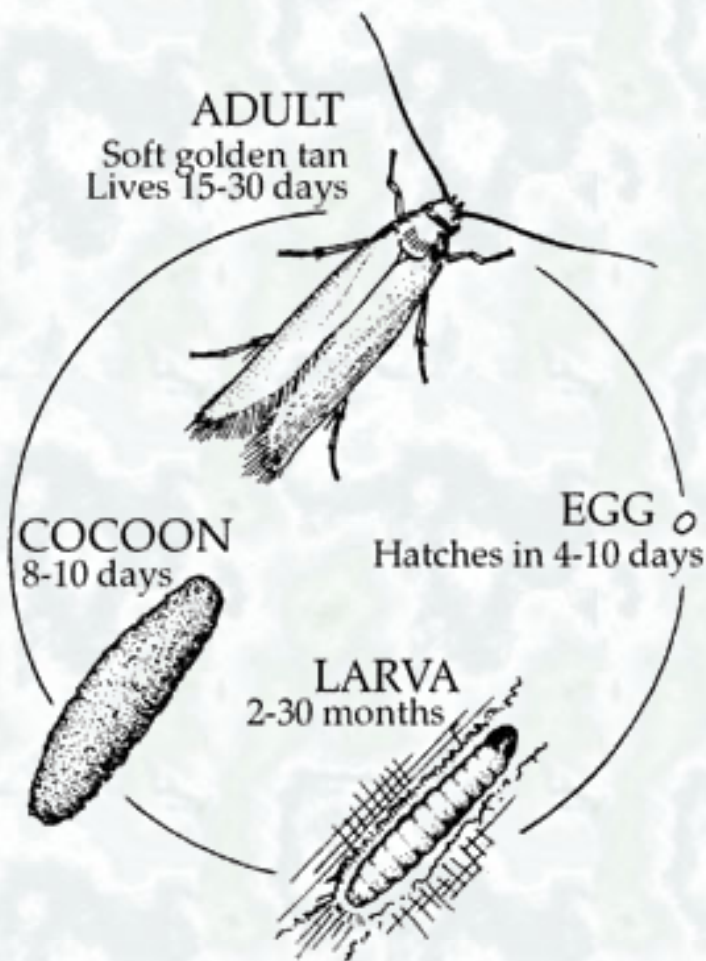
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Moth Damage

Flying clothes moths do not eat your rugs, but the females do lay hundreds of eggs each, and the eggs hatch into larvae that consume wool, fur, feather, and silk fibers. Moths and their larvae thrive in dark, undisturbed areas where a rug gets little traffic and is not often vacuumed. A bad infestation sometimes leaves a cobweb-like veil in the area of the damage, along with fine, sand-like debris. An infestation often involves more than one rug, and can spread to (or from) woolens or furs hanging in a closet or sweaters stored in a drawer. A rug damaged by moths is not difficult to repair, but reweaving a large area of the rug can be expensive.

To identify the presence of moths, look for one or more of these signs:

- **flying moths** -- the common clothing moth (*tineola bisselliella*) is the villain. It's small, 3/8" long or less, and is usually silvery tan or soft brown in color. This moth flies slowly but with a rapid flutter of small wings. If you try to snatch one out of the air, the clothes moth folds its wings and drops to the floor.
- **bare spots in the pile** -- often moth larvae will prefer the taste of one color yarn over another, and so the bare spots may involve



The life cycle of the clothes moth (Not to scale)

To prevent moth damage:

- Vacuum the entire face of the rug weekly if possible. At least several times a year, vacuum the back side of the rug and the pad and floor underneath. If the rug is too large to handle, flip the edges over, and vacuum at least one to two feet in along the borders on the back side of the rug. The corresponding areas on the pad and floor should also be vacuumed.
- Be aware that moth balls, flakes, or crystals (naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene) are ineffective in moth control for rugs. These materials act only as a minor repellent to moths. They do not kill moth larvae, and the naphthalene odor can be unpleasant and difficult to remove from the rug. Cedar scent is useless as a prevention for moth damage.
- Any place the vacuum cannot reach, such as areas of the rug under furniture, or a rug hung on the wall, can be sprayed with a household, non-staining insecticide made for the purpose. Most of these products contain pyrethrins (a class of insecticide originally extracted from the flower heads of chrysanthemums) among the active ingredients. Although poisonous to many varieties of insects, pyrethrins break down quickly after application and are considered safe for use in the home. **BE CAREFUL IN CHOOSING AND APPLYING ANY INSECTICIDE.** Choose a product designed for the intended use and follow directions for application, storage, and disposal carefully.

If a rug will be stored for a long period see the recommendations on [storage](#).

- some specific colors but not others.
- **webs** -- white gossamer filaments covering a patch of the rug's pile (often only present with a bad infestation).
- **cocoons** -- 1/8" diameter x 1/2" long slightly fuzzy cylinders usually the same color as the rug's pile (larvae camouflage their cocoons to blend in with the color of the wool that surrounds them).
- **larvae in the pile** -- slender, white, worm-like moth larvae about 3/8" long can sometimes be seen just after hatching, before they've constructed cocoons. It is the larvae that actually eat the wool.
- **sand-like particles** down in the pile of the rug -- this material, often tan or brown in color, regular in size, and granular in look, is the excretion of the larvae.
- **broken/loose plies** -- where the larvae have chewed through yarn overcastings or bindings.

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Carpet Beetle Damage

Similar in appearance to moth damage, but caused by the larvae of a small (1/8" long), dark brown or brown-black insect. Beetle larvae damage is usually not as severe, nor as messy as moth damage. Strategies to prevent or treat [moth damage](#) will be effective against carpet beetles as well.

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Dog Chews

Puppies tend to chew rugs because of tooth growth. The best way to prevent chew damage is to control the puppy by keeping it away from the rug. Sometimes sprinkling an ounce of moth flakes under the rug along the edges will help the dog keep his distance from the rug.

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Cat Scratchings

Cats which are not declawed can do significant damage to a rug if they habitually sharpen their claws on it. As with dog chews, the best prevention is to control the cat's activities. Sometimes a squirt gun (squirt the cat when it starts to scratch the rug) can be used to condition the cat to avoid the rug.

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Vacuum Cleaner Damage

In almost all instances, regular vacuuming of an Oriental rug with an electric vacuum cleaner is good for the rug--a dirty rug wears prematurely, and regular vacuuming helps prevent dirt on the surface of the rug from filtering down into the pile where it can accumulate and cause increased wear. Still, be careful with a cleaner equipped with a power brush or "beater bar"; these powered brushes in the vacuum head help the vacuum do a good job on machine-made carpeting, but they cause a raking effect on the top layer of an Oriental rug's pile if used too strenuously. If your vacuum cleaner has a power brush, use it only occasionally and lightly on your Oriental rug. For routine cleaning, use just the plain vacuum nozzle. This is especially important for fringes; try not to run an upright vacuum or a power brush attachment over fringes. The brush shreds the fringes and causes rapid wear. Frequently fringes get caught and chewed up by the rotating mechanism of the brush.

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Chemical Damage

An old trick of some rug cleaners is to bleach the cotton fringe of a rug snowy white before returning the rug to the customer (on the theory that if the fringe looks nice and clean, the whole rug looks cleaner). Unfortunately, chlorine based bleach weakens natural fiber over time. We have seen many rugs with "dead fringe"--fringe so weakened by repeated bleachings that a tug on the fringe will tear away small bits. If you must have snowy white fringe, use a dilute bleach solution, and be sure to rinse the fringe very thoroughly.

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Sun Damage

Most rug dyes are quite resistant to sun fading or bleaching. Still, ultraviolet rays are a powerful force of Nature, and a rug will likely fade over time if used for years in a very sunny area. Consider sheer drapes to block some of the direct sunlight, and try to turn the rug end-for-end once a year to even out possible color changes.

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Uneven Wear

A rug should be turned end-for-end once every year or two to even out wear and color change. Try not to use a rug on a very uneven floor. An area of the floor that is raised (a loose floorboard, a transition strip from one flooring material to another, etc.) causes the part of the rug that covers it to wear much more rapidly than the rest of the rug.

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To Move a Rug

When you move a big rug to adjust its position, there is a better way than just to pull with brute force on the fringe or edge. A simple trick is to rapidly wave the edge of the rug up and down a foot or two close to the floor while pulling. This ripple effect sends a cushion of air under the rug, making it very easy to move.

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To Lay a Rug Flat

If a rug has been folded for shipping, there may be wrinkles or creases when you lay it down. To flatten them out, first determine which way the nap lays (rub your hand across the pile in the direction of the fringe: the pile will feel smooth one way and will roughen up when rubbed in the opposite direction). Stand at the end of the rug with the nap running toward you. Roll the rug up from this end as tight as you can, then slowly unroll and smooth it down along the way. Persistent wrinkles in the same spot can be pressed from the face of the rug using a steam iron on "wool" setting (be sure to iron the pile in its original direction). Persistent wrinkles should be attended to, as premature wear along the ridges made by the wrinkles can result. Some rugs have wrinkles "built in" as the rug is woven--try not to buy one of these!

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Rug Pads

Pads under Oriental rugs can prevent sliding, prolong the life of the rug by cushioning the impact between shoe sole and hard floor surfaces, and provide comfort under foot. To determine if you need a pad, the rule of thumb is: a heavy, thick rug does not necessarily need one, whereas a thin, soft rug does, as does an older rug or a rug that has been rewoven or patched or which has a weakened foundation. While a pad can extend the life of any rug, whether or not to use a pad under a new rug is often a personal decision based upon your preference for the feel of the carpet underfoot. A pad should be about an inch smaller than the rug all the way around (not counting the fringe) so that the pad will not show beneath the rug.

Pads can be made of materials like rubber, felt, polyester, or one of a number of synthetic foams. For a

number of years we have preferred pads for larger rugs made of a polyester felt about 3/8" thick. This material is quite dense and is mechanically strong. We have seen rubber pads crack and crumble around the edges with time, and occasionally rubber pads will become gummy and stick to an older floor finish or even to the back of the rug. Many of the synthetic urethane foam pads seem too soft and lightweight to provide much support to the rug.

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Curled Corners and Curled Edges

Because of the way it is woven, a rug may have corners and/or edges that tend to curl under. Straighten them out when you lay the rug down. If the edges curl badly, the rug may need the attention of a good rug repair person. Using a rug with badly curled-under edges or corners causes unnatural wear patterns that can damage the rug and be difficult to repair properly.

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Sizing or Blocking a Rug

When a rug is out of square or has built-in wrinkles, sizing or blocking may help. A rug is sized by turning it over, making it as square and flat as possible, and fastening it down along the edges (we use a staple hammer). A mixture of sizing and water is sprinkled over the back of the rug, and the rug is allowed to dry. The moisture in the sizing helps equalize tension in the foundation of the rug, and the sizing helps the rug hold its square, flat shape. Note that even a good quality rug is rarely perfectly rectilinear. When blocking a rug the choice is sometimes between getting it flat or making it square--from the standpoint of what's good for the rug, it is almost always better to make the rug flat than to make it perfectly rectilinear.

Used with care and when appropriate, sizing makes a rug more attractive and usable. Used incorrectly, blocking can distort or even damage a rug. Over-aggressive blocking will not remedy the problems of a badly crooked or poorly woven rug. Don't try this at home! Sizing is definitely a process best handled by an experienced dealer or rug repair person.

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Storage

When a rug is to be stored for more than a few months it should be cleaned, sprayed with insecticide, and wrapped in protective plastic or a tough synthetic paper like "Tyvek"® building paper. Don't use newspaper or common brown wrapping paper. These materials are not chemically stable (they are usually quite acidic), and do not provide the protection from insects or moisture the stored rug needs. Make sure the rug is completely dry. Think twice about using moth balls or flakes--these materials have little repellent effect, and the odor they impart to the rug can be difficult to remove. Cedar scent is useless in moth control. Store the rug in a clean, dry place out of the reach of squirrels or other rodents. Periodic inspection of the rug is strongly recommended.

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Summary

You should vacuum your rug often--both front and back sides, and turn it end-for-end once in a while.

Although many kinds of damage can be repaired, prevention is much easier (and cheaper) than repair, so avoid placing potted plants on the rug, and keep an eye on your pets. Inspect the entire rug periodically for signs of wear or damage. Have your rug cleaned only when it really is dirty. When you see something wrong with your rug that is beyond your ability to rectify, don't hesitate to call a reputable Oriental rug dealer for advice. With just a bit of care your Oriental rug will provide many years of utility and pride of ownership.

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