

SISAL

WHAT IS SISAL?

Sisal is a bast fiber obtained from the leaves of the plants belonging to the agave family.

The actual processing of the fiber begins with the separation of the fiber from the chlorophyll, pectin, and other fleshy parts of the leaf. The fiber then goes through further processing at which point it can be dyed by means of direct or acid dyes.

Below is a sample of sisal that was used as a floor covering.



PAINTED SISAL

Sisal floor coverings can also be painted by hand or screen-printed using a variety of paints. Most paints used are extremely durable, but with time and traffic they can soil, crack, chip, and/or wear off. Cleaning can also weaken the glues, which affix the paint causing further deterioration.

BLENDS

Sisal is increasingly being blended with other fibers such as wool. Wool can dramatically change the look and texture of a sisal floor covering. To some degree, it can make cleaning more difficult...testing is always a must, before any cleaning method, product or system is used.

BACK-COATINGS

Many sisal floor coverings have latex back coatings. Solvents can easily destroy many of these backings and should always be tested. If the backcoating is destroyed, the integrity of the sisal can be compromised.

Some sisal floor coverings have a cushion-like padding adhered to the back. Again, it is important to always test solvent-based chemicals to determine if they can be applied safely.

LOOK-A-LIKES

There are several look-a-like fibers that often get classified as sisal but are not. Coir, which comes from coconut husks, is generally used in mats and area rugs. It is darker and coarser than sisal. Relatively new in the market is sea grass, which has a smooth texture and is most often used as area rugs.

Sisal, coir and sea grass are all cellulosic fibers and, as such, the general care instructions are similar.

WHAT SOME MANUFACTURES SAY ABOUT CLEANING

Some manufactures recommend drycleaners such as Host or "dry foam" for overall cleaning while others suggest hosing the sisal off in your driveway. But every situation is different... dry cleaning doesn't work well on pet urine stains or large liquid spills. Water-based cleaners don't work well on grease and oil spills. There is no "best way" to clean sisal... it is a matter of using the best chemistry and technique with each situation.

CLEANING SISAL

To understand the cleaning of sisal one must understand the type of soiling and staining to which it is subjected. Dry soils such as traffic soil and airborne soils are a constant problem. The weave of the sisal (over/under without a pile) suspends these soils near the surface.

As with all floor coverings, one of the best preventive measures is to vacuum on a regular basis. This will remove most of the dry soils. It also prevents these soils from acting like sand paper and causing unnecessary wear.

Water-based spills such as coffee and colas are another whole problem. It may need to be spotted with water-based

cleaners, which can cause cellulosic browning or, in some cases, lighter or "bleached" spots. That is why it is always necessary to TEST any procedure or chemical before proceeding.

CLIENT CARE

One of the best ways to remove liquid spills is to attend to them as soon as possible. Blotting with a dry paper or terry towel will usually remove most of the problem. The area should then be dried as soon as possible.

Grease spots should be spotted with a mild solvent such as Kleen-Tec or OMS, being sure to use products sparingly and always from a towel.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Even though sisal is very absorbent and can stain readily, with proper protection and maintenance sisal can perform well. The Fiber-Seal Fabric Care System can benefit sisal, coir and sea grass by decreasing absorbency and lengthening the time between cleanings.

AS WITH ALL FABRICS AND FINISHES, ALWAYS TEST CHEMICALS AND/OR PROCEDURES FIRST IN AN INCONSPICUOUS AREA.