

TRADITIONAL UPHOLSTERY MATERIALS

What's in my furniture?



Up until the early twentieth century horse hair & straw were some of the most commonly used stuffing materials, but that's not all you will find. This reference sheet was created to help you identify some of the lesser known materials that may be found in your antique pieces. Many are still used today in traditional upholstery.



Considered the best material for stuffing, horse hair is taken from the tail and mane of the animal. Since it is expensive, it will often be found only as a thin top layer over a less expensive stuffing (such as straw and moss). It may also be mixed with hog hair.



Flax straw, not to be confused with hay, is often used as a base layer, typically topped with a thin layer of horse hair. It can also be used as the only stuffing material topped with layers of cotton. Straw is often perceived as used in lower quality furniture but this is not necessarily true.



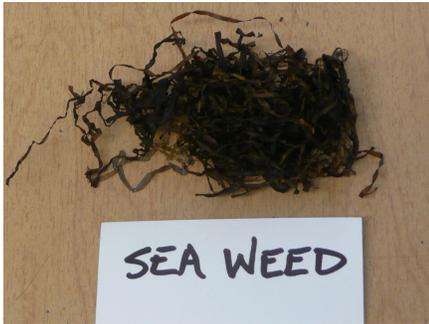
Spanish moss is another popular stuffing material found in antique pieces. The moss, which is not regular moss but actually an air plant, has been cured and cleaned. The end product is a dark curly material similar in appearance to horse hair.



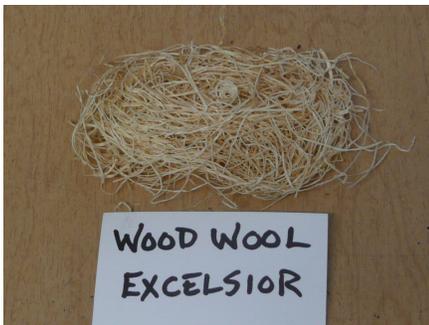
Coconut fiber sometimes referred to as Coir is the fibrous material found between the hard, internal shell and the outer coat of a coconut. It's used as a first stuffing and for stitched rolls or edges. It is very resilient.

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Sea Weed over time dries becoming hard and brittle. Eventually cracking into small flakes. Today it is no longer used in the commercial upholstery market.



Wood Wool Excelsior resembles straw but is actually made from softwoods cut into narrow strips by machines. It was used initially for mattresses in the late 1800's to early 1900's and eventually to make soft upholstered furniture and toys.



Sea grass is a flowering plant that grow underwater.



Tow is a coarse, broken fiber such as flax, hemp or jute. Flax tows are often used as upholstery stuffing.

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Kenaf is a tropical plant of the mallow family that yields a fiber similar to jute. It is a common wild plant of tropical and subtropical Africa and Asia and has been a source of textile fiber for such products as rope, twine, bagging and rugs.



Kapok is a silk-like fibre obtained from the large seed pods of the Kapok tree. The tree does not need to be cut down since it comes from the pod. Can be used in pillows as an alternative to down, or compressed into a felt-like padding used for seats. Repels moisture and is very soft.



Vegetable Fiber



Cotton is used as a topper to the previously mentioned stuffing materials. Cotton compresses down to a firm but comfortable padding. It helps to smooth and even out the surface.

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