



National Association of Institutional Linen Management

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Hospitality Linens

The major function of table linens is 'aesthetic appeal' as they are used to enrich the dining experience, add to the ambiance and increase the Diners' expectations to pay more for the food. Therefore, in an institutional setting table linens are selected to add beauty, to create an attractive addition to the table surface and/or carry out a decorative theme, e.g., to set a casual or formal mood or to complement the table service or the interior decor.

Two terms, napery and linens, are used to refer to the products included in table coverings. Napery is a general term for tablecloths and napkins and is often used in labeling institutional products. Linen is an all-encompassing term used to describe sheets, towels, tablecloths, napkins, and related products that were originally made of linen. Hospitality linens include an assortment of products produced for use on table-tops including such items as tablecloths, runners, place mats, napkins, and silencers. With the exception of silencers, all of these items are visible in use, therefore, they are designed to be attractive additions to the table surface, and often complement the interior decor as well.

Fiber Content: Most institutional table linens are composed of 100% cotton, 100% polyester, or a blend of cotton and polyester.

- Cotton -provides an absorbent product that is susceptible to water based stains. But, if the product is white, the cotton product can be laundered in hot water and bleached to remove most stains. If the product is dyed, all cotton may create a color fastness issue. The loss of color, especially for dark and intense colors can cause problems in mixing and displaying table linens that have been laundered more than others. This is due to the fact that with repeated laundering the cotton product tends to experience progressive color loss. Also, all cotton table linens have a tendency to shrink unless they are finished for shrinkage control.
- Polyester -by virtue of the polyester fiber and its performance characteristics, polyester table linens will be durable and may provide longer serviceability than all cotton. Table linens of 100% polyester provide the linen manager with a product that will retain its original color over the average life span of the product. Polyester is a thermoplastic fiber and therefore it can be heat set during manufacturing. This can create a product that is dimensionally stable, which will also have excellent resiliency properties, i.e., the product will resist wrinkles if correctly processed. Processing polyester will require the laundry manager to take into account the heat sensitivity of the fiber and lower the temperature of both the washing and drying operations.

A potential concern with 100% polyester linens is that consumers may find the hand or feel objectionable. Users may complain that the product feels like a synthetic and/or that it is not as absorbent as 100% cotton linens.

- Cotton/polyester blends -are an alternative to the 100% cotton product, which may shrink and experience color loss or the polyester product, which may have an objectionable hand. The percentage of each fiber within the blend will determine the extent of color fastness, dimensional stability and durability of the finished product. The higher the percentage of cotton the more similar the product will perform as cotton. The higher the percentage of polyester the more like polyester the product will perform. The most common blend found in institutional linens is 50/50 cotton/polyester.

A cotton/polyester blended, table linen may experience some color loss and have an increased tendency to pill or collect lint on the surface of the product. Also, cotton/polyester blends can experience dimensional change during repeated processing.

Construction: Most institutional table linens are constructed of woven fabrics with variations in the fibers, yarns or weave type to create casual, contemporary or a formal appearance. Woven table coverings include the simple interlacing of yarns to create a mornie cloth to the elaborate interlacing patterns of the jacquard loom used to create the distinctive surfaces of damask. In general the more complicated the weave the more expensive the product.

- Plain, Twill or Satin -the three basic types of woven fabrics are used to create a variety of table linens. These weave types may be used alone or in combination with one another to produce a various styles and designs of table coverings.
- Momie -any fabric made by the crepe or granite weave, which produces a small, irregular, pebble character on the fabric surface. Momie cloth is a classic fabric used for table linens in the hospitality industry .The surface effects of the crepe weave adds to the aesthetic appeal while creating a durable and serviceable product.
- Damask -one of the oldest and most popular table cloths. Damask was originally a silk fabric with woven floral designs made in China and introduced into Europe through Damascus, from which it derived its name. Table damask is a lustrous Jacquard woven fabric with an elaborate floral or a geometric pattern formed by warp satin weave floats over a background of filling satin weave. The pattern is distinguished from the ground by contrasting floats at right angles to each other which reflect light differently and add luster . Damask table linens cost more than the other weave types due to the complexity of the construction of the fabric. But the aesthetic appeal of damask table linens can far outweigh the added cost.

Edge Finishes: Manufacturers employ various techniques to finish the raw edges of the fabric when constructing table linens. Fabric edges may be finished with a small hem, binding, or with machine serging. Regardless of the type of edge finish one should evaluate the stitch length and closeness of the stitch. Poor quality edge finishing may cause the product to be removed from service prematurely as the fabric edge will be the first area to show wear .

Finishes for Table Linens: Treatments applied to table linens include color, soil release, anti-microbial and mercerization. Of these treatments, color has by far the greatest aesthetic appeal but soil release finishes may be the most beneficial to the laundry manager.

- Color- All white table linens are easier to mix and match and during processing it may be easier to remove spots and stains, especially when the product can be bleached. Although the majority of institutional table linens are white, they can be dyed in a wide range of colors. Colored products, especially all cotton, may create a problem due to poor colorfastness. Vat dyed products have been shown to reduce color fading. Vat dyes are a group of dyes that can be used to produce bright colors in cotton textiles with a high degree of wash-fastness.
- Soil Release -The most common finish applied to institutional table linens is a soil release compound, especially all polyester and cotton/ polyester blend. These finishes are designed to enhance the release of stains during the laundry process but they do not prevent stains from happening. Soil release compounds increase the hydrophilic nature of fibers, so the water can more readily carry the detergent molecules into fiber crevices to emulsify and remove the soil. Soil release finishes can also help prevent re-deposition of soils during the washing process.

The soil release finishes were developed to improve the performance of soil removal from polyester fabrics. Two of the most common trade names for soil release finishes are Visa and Scotchgard.

Starch in itself acts like a soil release finish for cotton and cotton/polyester table lines. Starch is a water soluble compound and during the washing process the surface soils tend to wash away as the starch is removed.

- Anti-microbial -a chemical treatment that prevents the growth of bacteria or molds. This could be advantageous in linens that are stored prior to washing especially if the fiber content contains cotton. Cotton is much more susceptible to mildew than polyester but heavily soiled linens can mold or mildew regardless of the fiber content.
- **Mercerized (ing) -a strong alkali (sodium hydroxide) treatment of cotton. The process causes a permanent swelling of the fiber, thereby increasing its luster, strength and affinity for dyes. Mercerizing enables the textile industry to provide brightly colored table linens to the hospitality industry.**

Selection & Sources for Table Linens: The selection of the product will depend on the institution but, in general, product selection of table linens is done by the food and beverage department and the laundry manager may or may not be involved. The typical selection is based on how it will look on the table but ideally the laundry manager should be involved and have input in to how the product will perform. This is crucial to the long term use and care of table linens. If management expects the original appearance of the product to be maintained over the expected life span of the product then selection should be a team effort.

The assortment of products produced for use on table-tops includes tablecloths, runners, place mats, napkins, silencers and skirts. Most of these items are available in square, round, oval and rectangular shapes and in various sizes.

- Tablecloths -should be selected to cover the tabletop and drop from five to 10 inches on all sides.
- Runners -are approximately 12 inches wide and drop from five to 10 inches.
- Place mats -may be rectangular, round or oval and today may be used in addition to the tablecloth to add to the ambiance of the table setting.
- Napkins -are typically square and range from 12 to 22 inches. Cocktail napkins are 5 inches square.
- Silencers -are placed under tablecloths and function to reduce the noise of the china and/ or crystal in addition to protection of the table itself.
- Skirts -widely used in conference or meeting rooms. They function to conceal the underneath side of the table and add to the aesthetics or the ambiance of the room.

Sources for table linens include both domestic and imported suppliers. Today a high quality linen is available from numerous domestic suppliers. But an imported product can also be of very high quality, e.g., Irish Linen imported from England or Ireland.

Processing of Table Linens: If the appearance of the table linens affects the overall quality of the dining experience, then it is the responsibility of the laundry manager to maintain the aesthetics in addition to the durability of the product. The laundry manager should use fiber content and color as key factors in determining the appropriate method of laundering table linens. If the product is white and made of 100% cotton, the water temperature and laundry products used will enable the laundry manager to remove most stains and retain the original appearance of the product. If color has been added, then the retention of this color becomes a key concern. If the fiber content includes a manmade fiber, such as polyester, the temperature and laundry product selection should account for the properties of this fiber content.

Stain removal is another major concern for the laundry manager when caring for table linens. One can assume that table linen will be soiled with both water and oil-based stains. Therefore, pretreatment should account for the fact that hot water will tend to permanently set-in such stains as coffee and tea but hotter water temperatures are required to remove most oil-based stains.

Guidelines for Processing Table Linens:

- **Sorting:** Check to make sure that all is foreign matter (food & utensils) is removed prior to laundering.
Sort by color. Whites should be washed separately. Sort colors by shade into light, medium and dark. Never mix light and dark colors.
Sort by fiber content. All cotton whites require different processing than white 100% polyester.
- **Laundering:**
Do not overload to help prevent staining and/or poor soil removal. Select the water temperature and chemicals based on the fiber content, e.g., 100% cotton, whites can be laundered in higher water temperatures and most can be bleached with chlorine.
Select the cycle which includes a Warm water flush at the beginning of the cycle to assist in stain removal.
Read the manufacturer's recommendation for washing. Most table linens should not be processed with a fabric softener.
- **Drying:**
Do not overload to help prevent excessive wrinkles.
Select temperature and cycle based on fiber content. A 100% polyester table linen absorbs less water during the washing process and less time will be required to remove this moisture during drying.
Also, polyester linens should be completely dry before the cool down cycle begins but cotton and cotton/ polyester blends are easier to finish if they retain some residual moisture.
Do not over dry as it will contribute to more wrinkles and a harsh hand or feel.
- **Ironing:**
Table linens are traditionally ironed to provide the aesthetic finish.
Select the temperature and conditioning based on the fiber content. A 100% cotton linen with up to 30% moisture will finish with a better hand than an over dried linen.
Starch and/or sizing will improve the finish and add to the aesthetics of all cotton table linens but may also be used with other fiber contents.