

What to Know About JUTE RUGS

Challenges abound for rug cleaners dealing with jute rugs.
Here's how to handle them.

BY LISA WAGNER

In the past, jute was used as a foundation fiber in some hooked, needlepoint, and (a few) pile rugs. Today, however, there seems to be a “jute renaissance.”

Jute has become one of the more widespread fibers in the rug world, especially in rugs coming out of India.

“disposable rugs” if they are in heavy-use locations. Though these rugs are marketed as “ecofriendly,” the fact that they reach landfills faster than traditionally woven rugs is not particularly environmentally friendly.

The most common challenges for professional rug cleaners that come

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from jute rugs and how to handle them is detailed within this article.

Jute browns with water

If you are a professional carpet cleaner who has ever had to tackle installed wall-to-wall wool carpet, which happened to be woven on a jute backing, then you know how dangerous this situation can be.

We are seeing jute used not only for foundation fibers, but also as a face fiber of rugs.

From the retailer’s point of view, jute rugs have two major advantages: Jute plant fibers are quick and cheap to grow. Anything that gets rugs to market faster and at a lower cost is an advantage to the rug sellers.

For the cleaner (and consumer) there are major negative aspects to jute, specifically that jute is not a very durable or easy to clean fiber. Most jute rugs end up becoming



Get that jute even a little too wet, and the white wool can turn shades of coffee brown.

Jute will turn brown when it’s wet. It releases oils that brown the fibers. Since the way to get rugs clean is to *wash* them, this can create a cleaning challenge.

Some rug cleaners, if the rug is not too heavily soiled, opt to go with a good vacuuming and low moisture cleaning methods.

With heavily soiled jute rugs,

some cleaners wash, giving them an acid side rinse (to help prevent the browning) and dry them quickly. The longer a jute rug takes to dry, the

aggressive scrubbing is not an option. The fibers also easily discolor from spot and stain removers, so in-home cleaning efforts often leave large

help lessen the do-it-yourself damage, but often the time and skill needed for this type of work is not worth the rug involved.

Jute will look better after washing, but there is never a dramatic result with the work. Jute does not have great texture or sheen, so there is nothing to pop back to life with a great cleaning job.

Many of today's jute rug productions are loosely (quickly) constructed rugs that come from India, and they tend to stretch and buckle.

If the rug is anchored down with heavy furniture, the edges can stretch out of shape in the home. If the rug is given a full wash and moved around without careful handling when wet,



Do-it-yourself spot removal can make it even tougher to make a jute cleaning job look great.

Courtesy of the author.

more problems can arise.

Some cleaners dry these rugs face down to wick any browning issues to the back side. If a cleaner has a drying platform, the rug can lay face up with warm, dry air run underneath to create that same wicking dynamic toward the back side of the rug.

Jute does not clean up well

Jute does not give a *wow* when cleaned the way wool does, it does not have a great soil-hiding capacity,



Old, hand-hooked American rug from the second World War.

Courtesy of the author.



Old Spanish wool rug woven on a jute foundation that is deteriorating from age and moisture damage.

Courtesy of the author.

and the fibers easily break and split when under normal use. This means

bleach halos around all of the spills.

These can sometimes be dyed to

it also is possible to stretch these rugs out of shape. Once they lose their shape, it is next to impossible to get them square again.

These are *not* rugs to hang up wet to dry.

Jute becomes brittle

Jute is a very absorbent fiber, and if left damp too long, it will develop mildew and eventually dry rot.

As jute ages, it also dries out and becomes brittle — and loses its strength as a result. You will see this in very old hooked and needlepoint rugs in which the jute foundation splits and breaks along the folded

edges and in high-traffic areas.

With hand-hooked and rag rugs made during the era between the two World Wars, often the jute used as the foundation in these rugs begins to disintegrate with age. The face fibers (wool and cotton) stay completely intact, but the foundation threads split and tear. When deterioration occurs in the foundation


dog but smells horrible, this is the result of the jute.

The synthetic plastic fibers are not soaking up the pet urine; instead, the very absorbent jute interior fibers are acting as a sponge. The synthetic fibers hold the moisture inside the jute, so it is very difficult for the rug owner to dry out these areas, and this leads to a fungal and bacterial

trying to fix unexpected disasters.

If a rugmaker has cut so many corners to make a rug cheap that fully washing it safely is not possible, then explain the structural problems and any options that may be available to get the rug as clean as is safely possible.

If a rug owner has allowed five cats to make the jute rug their own litter box, and the odor is horrendous, then sometimes recommending that they put their money toward a new rug instead of saving this one is the best option.

Some rugs are worth saving. Jute rugs generally aren't. 

“The longer a jute rug takes to dry, the more problems can arise.”



Contemporary, Indian, chunky-braided jute rug with jute backing.

Courtesy of the author.



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of these rugs, they must be removed from floor use, and other ways to display them must be found because they will continue to fall apart.

With extremely fragile pieces from this era, traditional cleaning methods are not safe. These rugs need to be secured between nylon screens to allow no flexing or bending of the foundation and soaking and rinsing with as little agitation as possible. This will help prevent further damage to the deteriorating foundation fibers.

Jute holds odor like no other fiber

Jute is a primary fiber used in the production of machine-loomed rugs. When a customer brings in a synthetic-loomed rug and says the rug does not look stained from their

pet petri dish in these rugs.

Aggressive decontamination and odor removal steps need to be taken to make these rugs “clean” again, and sometimes the price to save the rug exceeds the cost to simply buy another one.

With these rugs, cleaners need to inspect the back side of the rug more closely than the front side. Dark shadows in the foundation will often be mildew and urine salts. If the problem is left alone for too long, these areas will develop into tears or holes.

Manage expectations

With all rugs, but especially with these jute creation rugs, the more time a cleaner spends pre-inspecting and testing, the less time will be spent