

Window Curtains...Planning and Selection 1951

--

Hensley, Martha L.

Morrison, Bess V.

Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics

Agricultural Research Administration

Home and Garden Bulletin 4, USDA

Issued February 1951

Archive copy of publication, do not use for current recommendations.

The PDF file was provided courtesy of the National Agricultural Library.

**Scroll down to view the publication.**



**Agricultural Network Information Center**

Ag 84 Hg  
Cop 4

#4

# Window Curtains

... PLANNING AND SELECTION



HOME AND GARDEN  
BULLETIN No. 4

U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

**BUREAU OF HUMAN NUTRITION AND HOME ECONOMICS**  
**Agricultural Research Administration**  
**U. S. Department of Agriculture**                      **Washington, D. C.**  
**February 1951**

*Prepared by Martha L. Hensley and Bess V. Morrison*  
*Color photography by Harvey B. Mohr*

## WINDOW CURTAINS—*planning and selection*

The right curtains can add much to the attractiveness of a room, so plan wisely for them. Because curtains are large masses of color and texture, it is only by planning that you can establish harmony between them and walls, rugs, furniture, and accessories.

The locality in which you live, your social and family activities, the proportion of time you spend in your home with daylight and artificial light—all need to be considered in the selection of curtains.

Architectural style of the house and geographic location may enter into the choice of curtains. For example, a coarse-textured curtain with a design of Mexican influence may be very desirable for an adobe house in the Southwest, but not appropriate for a Colonial home in the eastern part of the country.

Choice of curtains is influenced also by the spirit or character of the room—that indefinable something associated with furnishings, frequently with period furnishings such as Early American, Victorian, or Modern. Occasionally the spirit of a room is described by the characteristics of the furnishings as formal, informal, simple, luxurious, rustic, elegant, or sophisticated. Often because of the sturdiness or daintiness of the furnishings, the appearance of the room may be described as masculine or feminine.

Your family's likes and dislikes may be a deciding factor in the choice of curtains. If the favorite colors of all family members combine well, they might be found in a print that would make suitable living room or dining room curtains. A person's favorite color could be used in curtains for his bedroom.

The "dislikes" can be most helpful in curtain selection if you know the reasons for them. A person may have a distaste for blue curtains, for example, because at one time he had to live with some ill-selected, heavy-textured blue curtains that shut light and air out of a room. Knowing this, you would not only choose a color more pleasing to him, but also fabric of a more pleasing texture. And you

could make sure the curtains were hung so they would not shut out light and air.

In planning curtains consider more than eye appeal, although that is important. Curtains should also serve a useful purpose.

In a room with strong light, sheer glass curtains prevent glare by softening or diffusing the light. Of less transparent material, glass curtains will screen an unattractive view or give privacy from neighbors or passersby.

Draperies offer greater variety in color, design, and texture than glass curtains and so are more important in the decorative scheme of a room. By day, draperies can be used effectively to frame a view. Drawn across a window at night they give greater privacy than glass curtains.

One of the first steps in planning is to decide what you want curtains to do for the room. This decision furnishes a guide to the kind of curtains to choose. Will the purpose be served best by glass curtains or draperies, or are both needed? Should the material be sheer or nonsheer?

The printed linen draperies in the cover illustration show how curtains can serve a number of purposes. They take away the bare look of the window, soften the harshness of the frame, and give the room a lived-in appearance. And they frame a view.

The draperies are a balance and a connecting link for color. Their background color repeats that of the walls, and the colors in the all-over pattern unite the outdoors with the indoors. The floral design in the fabric and the blossoms of the shrubbery in summer repeat the reddish purple of the rug. The blue greens and yellow greens of the trees and grass, and the blue greens of the bowl and the fabric on the love seat are also found in the design.

When drawn, the curtains not only give privacy but make a lovely wall hanging that adds color and interest to the room.

## CREATING HARMONY IN A ROOM

To plan curtains in harmony with a room, first take stock of the room itself—its walls, floor coverings, furnishings, and accessories . . . its size and dimensions . . . its exposure and view. In the colors, textures, lines, and patterns that compose the total picture of the room, you will find clues to help in selecting the right curtains.

Observe walls and floor coverings first. They form the background of a room and affect space relationships, control color schemes, and influence the amount and kind of design that may be used in the room. In them you may find your most satisfactory clues for color, texture, line, and design in curtains. For example, there may be a color in the wallpaper or rug that you will want to emphasize in curtains. Or you may decide on plain curtains because there is already enough design in the room in the rug or wallpaper.

### USE OF COLOR

It is easy to use color skillfully if you understand the principles of color harmony and know something about color systems and the terms used to describe color.

Traditional color names such as pink, orange, and brown are familiar to all of us, and each season brings forth scores of new names to describe the popular colors. However, these names apply to areas of color; they do not define specific colors with exactness. Pink, for example, is a general term used for a wide range of colors. Two colors, both called pink, may be very different from each other.

To describe color accurately, systems of color standardization have been developed. One that has been widely accepted—the Munsell system—is used in this publication. It is based on the three dimensions of color—hue, value, and chroma—which describe a color as fully and accurately as the three dimensions of length, breadth, and thickness describe the shape of a box.

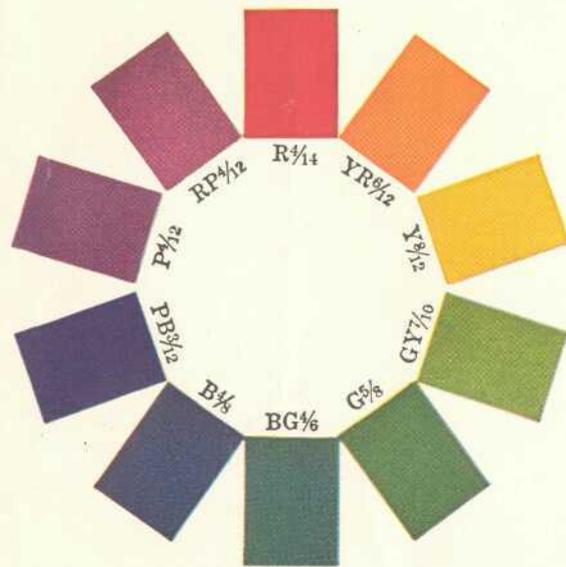
**Hue.** Hue is the color name, the dimension by which one color is distinguished from another, as *red*, *blue*, or *green*. In the Munsell system there are five principal hues—red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. All other hues are blends of these. The color circle on page 5 shows the five principal hues and five intermediate hues: Green yellow, blue green, purple blue, red purple, and yellow red. In a complete color circle there are many other intermediate hues, differing in the proportions of the principal colors they contain.

**Value.** Value is the dimension by which a light color is distinguished from a dark one—a light red from a dark red, for instance. Pure white is so light that no color can be seen in it. Pure black is so dark that no color can be seen in it. Between black and white there are various degrees of gray from light to dark. Colors can be seen at these same degrees of light and dark. By comparing any color with different steps of the scale it is easy to distinguish the value of that color.

Values for gray and red are shown in the chart on page 5. In the gray scale nine steps are shown, with white, the highest value, at the top of the scale and black, the lowest value, at the bottom. The fifth step represents a gray half way between black and white. Colors up to 3 in value are in the "dark zone." Those from 4 to 6 are in the "middle zone," and from 7 to 9 in the "light zone." The reds extending horizontally from each step of the gray scale have the same value as the gray. Those on a line with step 4, for example, all have a value of 4.

**Chroma.** Chroma is the dimension by which a bright color is distinguished from a dull (gray) one, a strong color from a weak (faint) one—for example, a bright red from a gray red. The chroma steps, as shown in the chart on page 5, extend horizontally from gray out to the strongest chroma. For instance, the red numbered 2 in the chroma scale has only a faint suggestion of color in it while that numbered 14 is the strongest that can be obtained.

TEN-HUE CIRCLE

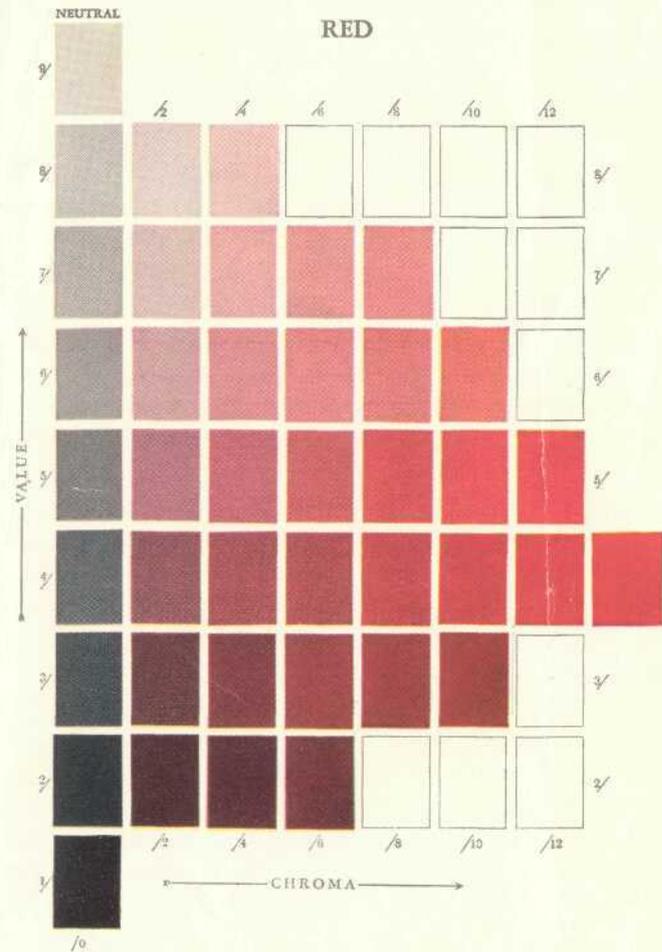


Above is a hue circle that shows the five principal hues and five of the intermediate hues of the Munsell color system: R, red; RY, red yellow; Y, yellow; GY, green yellow; G, green; BG, blue green; B, blue; PB, purple blue; P, purple; PR, purple red. The numbers indicate the value and chroma; for instance, the notation R 4/14 means that the red has a value of 4 (a medium value) and a chroma of 14 (the brightest obtainable for red). Many other intermediate hues besides those in this circle can be obtained by blending principal hues in different proportions. A 100-hue circle, for example, has 10 second intermediate hues and 80 special intermediate hues.

The reds in the chart at the right show how a color can vary from dark to light in value and from bright to dull in chroma without changing in hue. Any color can be compared with the neutral gray scale to find its value.

NOTE: Illustrations on this page are based on Munsell color charts. However, they are printed reproductions and the colors should not be considered as representing matches for Munsell Standard Papers of the same notation.

VALUE AND CHROMA CHART



By means of hue, value, and chroma you can describe any color accurately. For example, if you have a piece of colored fabric you call pink, you may run it up or down the value scale of red and across the chroma scale and find its location; for instance, it may be located in the eighth step of value and the fourth step of chroma and would be identified as 8/4.

## Choosing colors for curtains

Color in curtains can affect a room in various ways. The feeling of warmth or coolness may be influenced by hue, for there are warm hues and cool hues. Those containing yellow or red are warm. For centuries yellow has been associated with the warmth of sunshine, red with the warmth of fire. Blue is a cool hue.

Hues may be blended to produce a warmer or cooler effect; for example, green, which is between the warm and cool hues, becomes warmer when blended with yellow and cooler when blended with blue. Purple may be made warmer or cooler by blending with red or blue.

If windows receive a great deal of brilliant sunlight, a cool color for curtains may be the best choice. For a room with a cold north light you may want a warm color. For instance, yellow draperies would make a north room seem warmer; blue would have the opposite effect. However, the total amount of light in the room may be more important than exposure. You need to consider, too, that warm colors are aggressive and suggest activity. Cool colors are more passive—give a more restful effect.

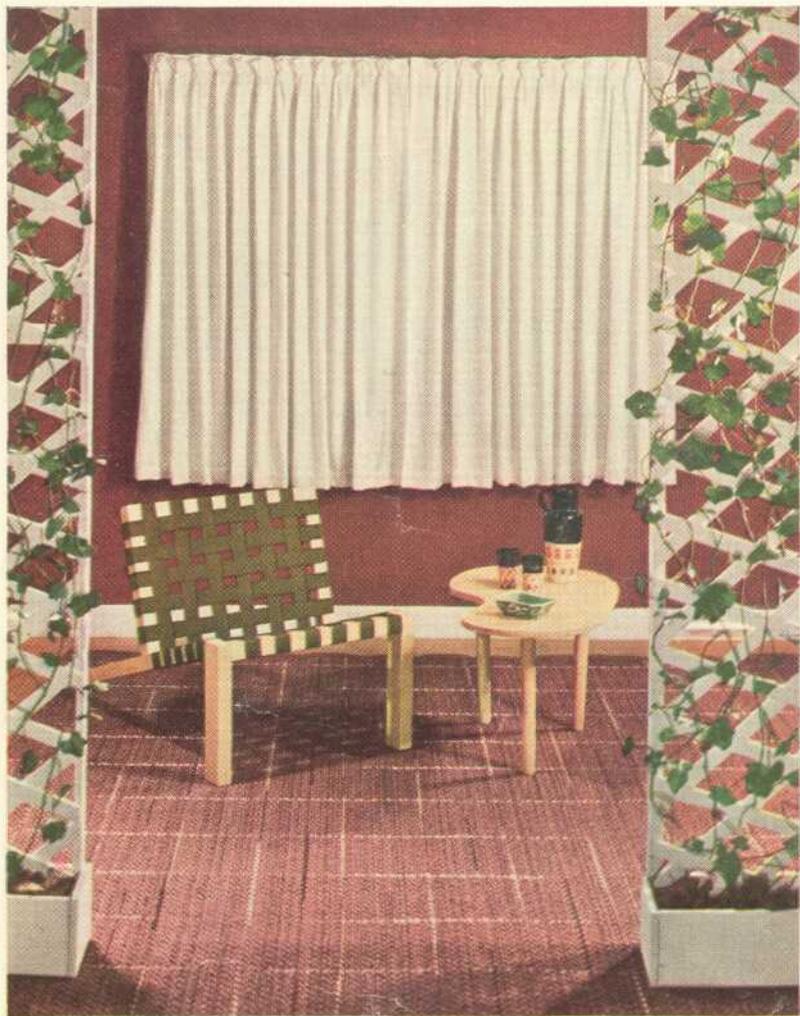
Along with hue, the value and chroma of a color need to be taken into account in selecting curtains.

By contrast in values you can give importance to curtains, as shown in the illustration at left on page 7 where curtains of light value are silhouetted against walls of dark value.

Dark values seem to decrease size and light values to increase size. For example, curtains of a very light value of blue make a small window look larger, while a blue lower in the value scale makes it look smaller. If a room is small, you can make it seem larger by using plain curtains in a light value with walls of the same hue and value. (See illustration at right on page 8.)



Related and contrasting colors are used in this room. Yellow greens, greens, and blue greens appear in the draperies, the foliage of the roses, and the wall hanging reflected in the mirror. The reds and yellows are also related hues. There is value contrast in both related groups. The striped wall-paper shown in the upper left corner is like that in the next room. It was included to show how color can be carried from room to room.



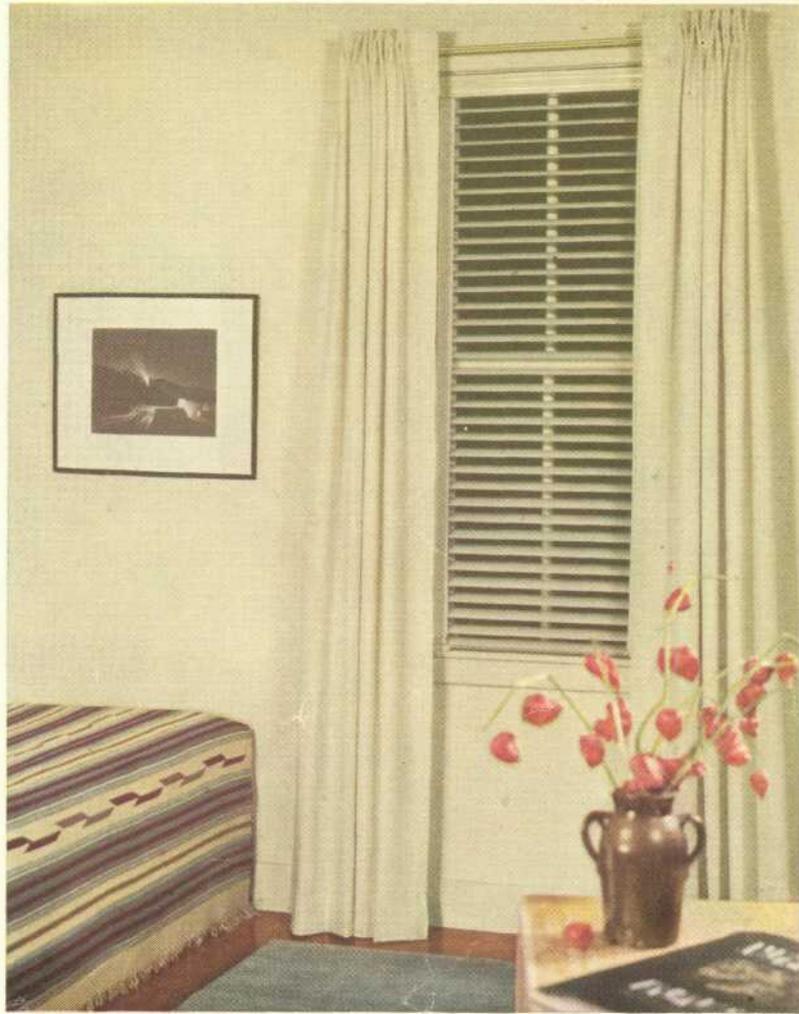
This porch-living room illustrates the striking effect of contrasting color values. Masses of light and dark attract attention to the room. The curtains, a very light value of red yellow, are silhouetted against walls of chocolate brown, a very dark value. The rug is a medium value. In the wood of the chair is another light value of red yellow. Contrast in hue as well as value is provided by the dark green webbing on the chair.



One way to add color interest to a room is to use a hue in chromas varying from bright to dull, as is done with the reds in the child's room pictured here. A red of bright chroma is used in the checked gingham curtains and the hand-woven fabric on the back of the chair. The reds inside the book-case and in the flowers of the wall decoration are of a dull or grayish chroma. The blue rug makes a pleasing contrast in hue.



The purples, red purples, blue purples, and blues in the floral design of the drapery fabric pictured here illustrate a related color harmony—the hues are all close together in the color circle. The color combination is especially interesting because the hues vary in value from dark to light and in chroma from medium-bright to dull. The design is on a light background of dull chroma that blends in with the walls.



In this room, contrasting colors—blue and red yellow—in different values and chromas are used effectively. The blues of the rug and the blanket on the couch range from light to dark. Very light, medium, and very dark values of yellow red are found in the curtains, the flowers, and the vase. Bright and dull chromas are used in good proportions—equal amounts of the bright blue and red yellow would be less pleasing.



In this room, dominated by oppositional lines, the balance and fine relationships of rectangular spaces create harmony without monotony. The dark, medium, and light values of the red-orange hue used in the draperies, furniture, and candles illustrate value contrast. The soft wool of the draperies contrasts in texture with the semiglossy fabric of the glass curtains, the waxed wood of the furniture, and the accessories.



Transitional lines dominate this room. The curtains, ruffled and tied back, make soft graceful curves that give a comfortable, informal effect. In the wallpaper, the chair, the plant and its holder, and the articles on the table, transitional lines also contribute to the effect of softness. Oppositional lines, needed to strengthen the appearance of the room, are provided by the doorway, the window frame, and the venetian blinds.

The eye is more attracted to strong, intense colors—those high in the chroma scale—than to duller ones. Curtains in a strong color are likely to dominate a room; duller colors can easily be toned in with many other colors.

Contrast in chromas can often be used effectively in curtains. For an interesting contrast you might choose a fabric with a background of low chroma with intense color accents in the design. Or for a more striking effect, use strong color accents intensified by sharp contrasts of values—for instance, curtains with a bluish gray background with a floral design of bright blue, blue green, yellow green, and red yellow in dark, medium, and light values.

## **Combining colors in a room**

Because of the area they cover, curtains play an important role in the color scheme of a room. No definite rule can be given for choosing your curtain color. You may want plain curtains that repeat one of the major colors in the room—the color of the walls, the floor covering, a sofa, or a chair. Or you may prefer to bring together in a patterned curtain fabric two or three colors used in the room and its furnishings.

Colors can be combined in different ways to produce harmony—and remember that the working out of chromas and values is as important as the selection of the hues. There are two general types of color combinations that give pleasing results; one produces related harmonies, the other complementary harmonies.

*Related harmonies.* A simple and easy harmony can be produced by using the variations of one hue, that is, the values of dark and light with intensities of bright and dull. This harmony can give much personality to a room if the amounts of dark and light and bright and dull colors are well balanced.

Colors that are related because they are next to each other in the color circle also produce beautiful harmonies. Purple, red purple, blue purple, and blue are examples of related colors and are illustrated at the left on page 8.

*Complementary harmonies.* Another way to achieve harmony is to use together the colors that lie directly opposite each other in the color circle—blue and yellow red, for example. These are known as complementary colors.

Complementary colors make a striking combination because of strong contrast. With a bright hue it is best to use a duller complement, and a larger amount of one hue than the other. Usually the less intense color is used in the larger amount, but not always. For instance, in a room with little daylight, a bright warm color may well dominate—bright yellow walls and rugs and red yellow curtains, with small amounts of grayish blue in the pattern of the curtains and elsewhere for contrast.

## **USE OF LINES AND SPACES**

Lines are the boundaries of spaces and shapes. Straight lines that meet at right angles—known as lines in opposition—produce a feeling of strength in a room. Curved lines—called transitional lines—soften the effect of lines in opposition.

There are many ways of combining lines to create harmony. Rectangles, formed by lines in opposition, offer infinite possibilities for interesting variation in proportion. When they dominate a room the effect is somewhat severe because the difference in the direction of the lines is emphasized. When transitional lines dominate, the opposite effect is produced. In every room some lines in opposition are needed for balance and strength.

Curtains may produce either lines in opposition or transitional lines. Plain tailored curtains, when hung without tie-backs, form lines in opposition. Tied back, the same curtains produce transitional lines. Ruffles on curtains also produce transitional lines.

A patterned curtain fabric offers a further illustration of the use of lines. A plaid design, for instance, is composed of rectangles and squares formed by lines in opposition. Curtains of plaid fabric give a more severe effect than those with an all-over design composed of many graceful curved lines.

## **USE OF TEXTURE**

By texture is meant the effect of weave, fiber, and finish on the looks and feel of a fabric. Textures may be described by their appearance as harsh or soft, lustrous or dull, smooth or rough, fine or coarse, or clinging, fluffy, or crisp. They may also be described by the "hand" or feel of the fabric as harsh, soft, smooth, coarse, pliable, stiff, inelastic, rough, slippery, heavy, or light.

Texture determines how well a fabric drapes—whether it falls in graceful folds or is stiff and awkward looking.

The spirit and character of the room determine to a large extent the texture that should be used in curtains. Other textures in the room also will influence the choice of curtains. Though a small amount of contrast in texture may be pleasing, too strong a contrast may be distracting.

If a room is rough and sturdy in character, curtains should be heavy enough or coarse enough to be in keeping. For example, lustrous satin draperies are out of place in a room with rough plastered walls, a large stone fireplace, small casement windows, leather upholstered furniture, and coarse shag rugs. A nubby novelty cotton fabric or coarse linen would harmonize with the room since its texture would be closely related to that of the walls, fireplace, rugs, and upholstery.

Draperies and glass curtains used together at a window may differ in texture but should have enough similarity so they do not conflict. With print draperies, for instance, glass curtains of scrim or marquise are pleasing, but damask or satin calls for a finer glass curtain material such as fine net or ninon. A heavy material like denim may be combined with theatrical gauze or fish net or other coarse-meshed fabric.

Texture is influenced in appearance by color, line, and shape. For example, a fabric in a light color appears more delicate in texture than the same material in a color of dark value. In patterned fabrics those with large designs in forceful colors seem heavier than those with smaller designs in duller colors.

The apparent size of a window can be influenced to some extent by the texture of curtains. Coarse, heavy materials tend to make the window seem larger and the room smaller. Filmy, light-colored glass curtains have the opposite effect.

## **USE OF DESIGN**

In choosing a patterned curtain fabric you need to think about the design in relation to the size of the room and the size of the windows, the type of furnishings, and the amount of design already in the room in wallpaper, floor coverings, and upholstery materials.

The size of the design in curtains should be in scale with the size of the room and its furnishings. For example, small designs in colors of light value, make a fabric appear dainty and light in weight. They are desirable for small rooms with small windows. Designs of large dimensions appear substantial in character and require a room of sufficient scale to support the heavy appearance. There are many designs of medium size that can be used to influence slightly the feeling of either weight or daintiness in a room.

The amount of design already in a room in floor coverings, wallpaper, or furniture limits the choice of pattern in curtains. Carefully chosen curtains of a stripe or plaid design may be attractive with a rug of all-over floral design, provided walls and furniture are plain. Or the same patterned fabric can often be used effectively in both curtains and slip covers for a sofa or for a chair or two. Too many different designs or too much of one design in a room is distracting.

**Matching design units.** In selecting ready-made curtains of patterned fabric be sure that the design is matched in each pair of curtains and that the arrangement of the design units is the same in all the pairs you buy. When buying material for curtains, remember that extra yardage may be needed to allow for matching the design. If you choose wisely and plan carefully before the fabric is cut, you may be able to avoid a problem in matching.

The larger and more distinct the design, the greater the need for care in matching the corresponding units in each pair of curtains and in all the curtains in the room. Patterned curtains, no matter how

beautiful in color and texture, lose much of their charm and decorative value if the design is not matched.

An all-over plaid design, such as the one shown at the left on page 9, is easy to match because the plaid is balanced, that is, color and spacing of the design units are the same at the top and bottom of the pattern and at the right and left sides.

In many all-over floral designs, the individual design units do not create the impression of an orderly arrangement. Such patterns are easy to use because lack of exact matching is usually not noticeable. On the other hand, distinct design units arranged in a definite order require exact matching. In the curtains with the all-over floral design shown at the left on page 8, lack of perfect matching would not be as disturbing as in those at the left on page 13, which have hand-blocked design units arranged in definite order.

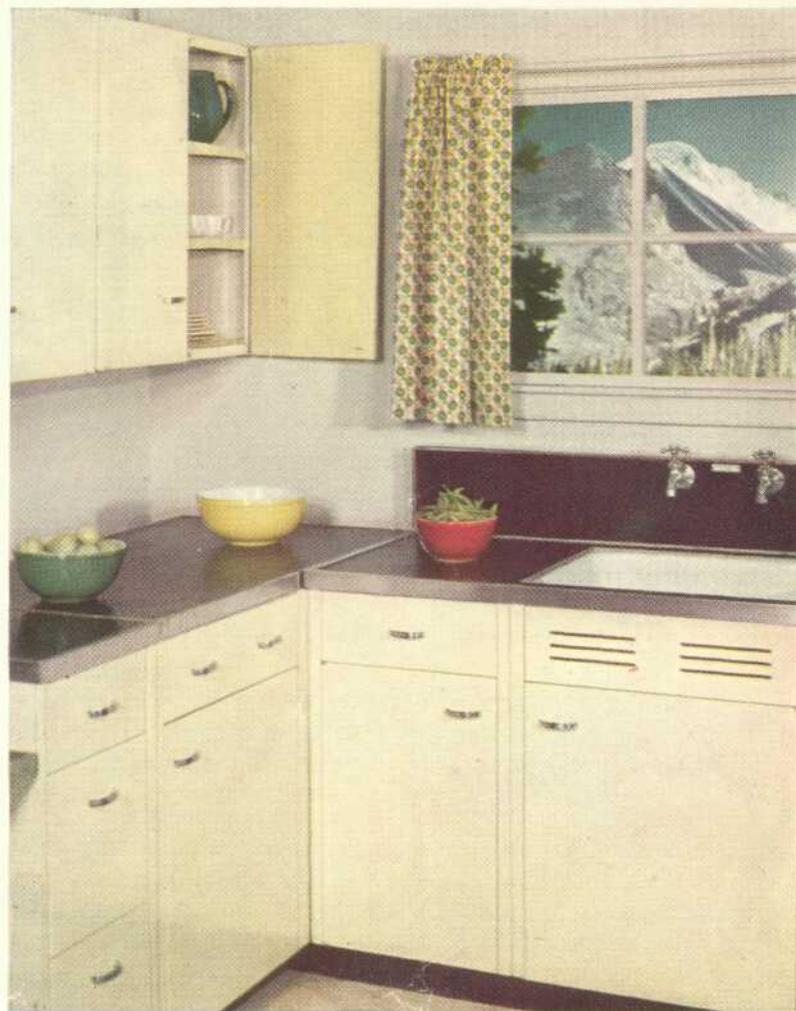
When a design is asymmetrical—when right and left sides are different and the up-and-down arrangement cannot be reversed—it may be impossible to match the pattern in the two sides of draperies. You can, however, make sure that a corresponding part of the design is the same distance from the floor on all the curtains. This helps give a feeling of repose even though the arrangement of the pattern in the two curtains is not identical.

## **STYLE OF CURTAINS**

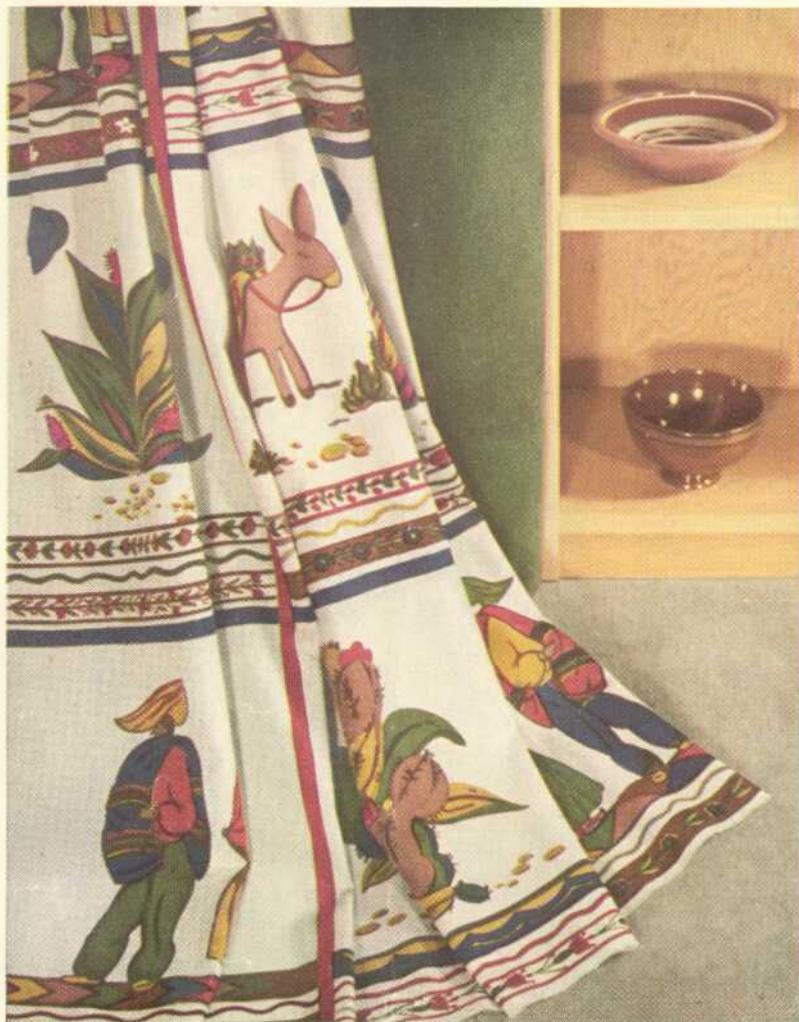
Curtains may be tailored or ruffled, straight or tied back.

Draperies may be lined or unlined. Linings protect the drapery fabrics from soil and direct sunlight, lengthening its life, but make the curtains harder to launder, more expensive to have dry cleaned, and of course add to the initial cost. Some people prefer the effect of sunlight coming in through unlined fabrics to the opaque effect of lined curtains.

Curtains look best when their length corresponds to a structural line; that is, a line established by the structure of the room. They may come to the sill, to the apron—the lower portion of the window frame below the sill—or to the floor.



The curtains at this kitchen window illustrate a well-chosen small all-over design. The cotton print, with a simple geometric design unit repeated in an interesting arrangement, gives a fresh and friendly appearance to the room. The pleasing color harmony combines green and red yellow in good proportions. The colors of the curtains are repeated in the linoleum on the floor and in some of the mixing bowls and dishes.



In a design unit like this one, made up of units arranged in a definite order, perfect matching of the pattern is important. Otherwise the effect is disorderly. In matching the design for a single pair of curtains of this fabric there might be a loss of as much as one to two design units, depending on the point at which the pattern was cut. This would amount to a considerable loss of material in curtaining a number of windows.



These draperies show the use of a fabric with an asymmetrical design—the right and left sides of the design unit are different and the up and down arrangement cannot be reversed. Although the pattern cannot be matched exactly at the inside edges, the material is cut so that corresponding parts of the design are the same distance from the floor in the two sides. This keeps the lack of perfect matching from being disturbing.

The choice of length depends to a great extent on the character of the room and the purpose the curtains are to serve. Sill- and apron-length curtains are more informal than floor-length ones. They are less expensive and easier to launder because of the smaller amount of material required. Short glass curtains are sometimes used with floor-length draperies.

In selecting ready-made curtains or in buying material, be sure of enough width for the fullness needed to make the curtains hang in graceful folds. A skimpy curtain is unattractive in itself and makes an awkward-looking window. A general rule is to allow for 100 percent fullness; that is, have the curtain twice as wide as the space it is to cover.

## CURTAINING DIFFERENT KINDS OF WINDOWS

There are windows of many different sizes and proportions, and many different kinds of curtain arrangements are possible.

Valances or cornices may be used across the top of windows or groups of windows to conceal curtain fixtures, to carry the eye across the top of the window when draperies are used, or to change the apparent height of windows. Cornice boards may be painted to harmonize with the draperies or walls.

**Small windows.** If windows are small in proportion to the room, you can plan curtains that will make them look taller and wider. For example, vertical lines in straight, floor-length draperies increase the apparent height of windows. An appearance of width is created by hanging curtains over the wall beyond the window instead of over the window itself.

To make a window appear shorter and narrower, choose short curtains and hang them so as to cover the window frame but not extend over the wall. A deep cornice or valance board also produces a shortening effect.

**Picture windows.** Picture windows usually need curtains that can be drawn to control light and to give privacy at night. A simple draw curtain may serve both purposes, but for better control of light and view, you may want two sets—one of glass curtain material and the other of a heavier drapery fabric. These are hung on traverse rods concealed by a cornice. The glass curtains, placed next to the window, are drawn when they are needed to soften light, and con-



To make this small window look larger, the curtains are hung against the wall so that they do not cover the window panes.

cealed behind the other set at other times. The heavier curtains are drawn over the windows to close out light and give complete privacy. They can be planned to serve also as a decorative wall hanging or to make the room look larger when the outside view from the window is closed out.

In parts of the country where sunlight is very intense, an additional set of draw curtains may be needed. This set, hung between the other two, is made of an unlined, semiopaque fabric that subdues light without closing it out entirely. The curtains protect furnishings from strong sunlight as well as prevent glare.

Curtains at picture windows should be hung so they extend over the wall and window frame without shutting out any of the view.

*Group windows and bay windows.* Many group and bay windows are interesting in themselves and should be curtained as simply as possible. They may be treated as individual windows or as one. Draw curtains, glass curtains, draperies, or a combination of glass curtains with draperies or draw curtains may be used.

When the windows are small it is often best to hang draperies so the windows appear as a single unit, with a cornice or valance across the top of the group and side draperies at each end.

If the windows are large, draperies may be hung across the portion

of the frame separating the sections or across small wall spaces between group windows, provided the proportions of the room will not be disturbed by the many vertical lines.

At low windows, a painted pole or shallow cornice is usually better than a deeper valance.

*Casement windows.* Draw curtains or draperies are appropriate for casement windows, and glass curtains may be used with them. If used at windows that open in, the glass curtains may be shirred over rods at the top and bottom of the sash or hung with rings just at the top so that they will swing with the window. At windows opening out, the curtains must be hung from the casing. If attached to the window sash, they would soon be spoiled by rain and outdoor air.

*Arched windows.* Shaped rods, obtainable in most drapery departments may be used in curtaining arched windows.

*French doors.* On french doors, the curtain fabric may be the same as that used in glass curtains at the windows. The curtains may be shirred at top and bottom on small brass rods and tightly stretched over the glass, or they may be allowed to hang loose at the bottom.

## SELECTING CURTAIN FABRICS

Each season there are scores of curtain and drapery fabrics on the market, both in yard goods and in ready-made curtains. A few commonly used materials are—

For glass curtains—marquisette and scrim, theatrical gauze, voile, organdie, lawn and batiste, net, dotted swiss, lace.

For draperies and draw curtains—brocade and damask, corduroy and velveteen, taffeta, chintz and prints, casement cloth, poplin and rep, denim, gingham.

In addition to the familiar staple fabrics there are many of new design and construction. A fabric may be made of one of several different fibers or from a combination of fibers. Marquisette, for

instance, may be of cotton, silk, any one of a variety of manufactured fibers, or a combination of two fibers such as cotton and rayon or rayon and nylon.

In use, curtain fabrics present many problems to the homemaker. Sometimes the color fades upon short exposure to sunlight, or the colors in printed designs bleed into plain areas when the curtains are washed. Many curtains shrink excessively and cannot be pulled or pressed back to their original size.

Often the yarn is not strong enough to withstand frequent laundering, and after short exposure to sunlight, will break easily. The damage may be on hems or edges where they are attached to the pins of the curtain stretcher, or it may be in the body of the curtains.

Some fabric failures due to construction are slippage of yarns, washing off of dots in cushion-dot marquisette, and washing out of tufts in chenille curtains.

## **PROPERTIES TO LOOK FOR**

For complete satisfaction in a curtain fabric, you need material that (1) is colorfast to light, laundering, or dry cleaning; (2) will not shrink or stretch; (3) has high resistance to fire; (4) is soil resistant; (5) deteriorates little with exposure to light and heat; (6) has excellent draping qualities; (7) is resistant to flexing, that is, the fibers will not break easily when bent as they are in folds of curtains; and (8) for glass curtains, material that softens and diffuses light yet does not close out too much.

## **READ THE LABEL**

Few labels today give complete information on all the properties that predict the fabric's performance, but it is to your advantage to read whatever information they do contain.

When reading labels, remember that you need to know not only that a fabric has been subjected to a shrinking process but also what the residual shrinkage is—how much it will still shrink. A fabric labeled not to exceed 2 percent residual shrinkage means that the cloth will not shrink more than three-quarters of an inch in a yard when washed.

Similarly, labels about colorfastness should state "colorfast to washing" or "colorfast to dry cleaning," not just "colorfast," which is a vague, indefinite term. Often, in place of colorfastness statements, labels on cotton fabrics will carry the words "vat dyed." Vat dyes are the best dyes known for cotton, but even they are not colorfast for all purposes.

If a label states that a fabric should be dry cleaned, do not attempt to wash curtains made of it without first making a laundering test.

It may take time and patience to find curtains or curtain material

suitable for your room and with information on shrinkage and colorfastness and at the price you can afford.

With no information on labels, it is impossible to know how a fabric will perform in use. In the store you can see how it will drape by hanging it over a chair or rod and studying it from a distance. By laundering a sample at home you often can get an idea of how much the fabric will shrink and fade.

When little or no information is available concerning shrinkage, generous allowances should be made in buying. For example, the material used in the curtains shown on page 7, right, shrank 3 inches to the yard when washed. This meant that, for the 1½-yard curtains, 4½ inches had to be allowed for shrinkage on each piece.

If you cannot find out whether a fabric is colorfast to light, you will need to make plans to protect it from direct sunlight, or to dye it in case of fading.

## **TRY THE FABRIC IN THE ROOM**

The only way to be sure that the design, color, and texture of a fabric will be satisfactory is to try it in the room. By hanging a piece at least ½ yard in length—a full yard is better—at a window where it will be used, you can see the effect of light on its appearance in the room and find out whether it will harmonize with the other furnishings. With an all-over design, you can judge whether the pattern is right in size for the room and the window.

At present there is no practical plan in retail markets, other than decorators' shops, for obtaining samples of curtain fabrics large enough to try at home in the room where they are to be used. Small samples are of some help in selecting colors and textures that harmonize with walls, rugs, and furnishings, but it is often hard to visualize the effect that a larger amount would have on the room. In view of the cost of curtain fabrics it is advisable before making a final selection to buy short lengths of several materials that offer possibilities, if they cannot be obtained on loan.

