



Buying Used Furniture

Furniture is a major purchase for many families. Good quality used furniture may be more durable and better looking than poor quality new furniture. Take time to shop carefully to get the best value for the money spent. Compare prices on items that you need. Then buy well-built, good quality pieces in a style that you like since you will live with it, look at it and use it every day.

Think About...

Here are some things to think about before buying furniture:

- Which pieces of furniture do you need the most? Plan to buy them first.
- What will the furniture be used for? In a small apartment or house, you need furniture that has more than one use--a couch that can also be used for sleeping or a table with extra leaves to make it bigger.
- How long will the furniture be needed? Do you want it to last "forever" or for a few years?
- How much care will you be giving it?
- What size limitations are there? Measure the space where you plan to put the furniture. Then measure the piece that you are planning to buy. Does it fit into the room? Can you get it through doorways, hallways and stair wells?
- How much can you afford to spend? There are a variety of places to buy furniture, and attractive, comfortable furniture comes in all price ranges.

Used furniture can be a bargain if you choose it carefully. Check the newspaper ads and watch for bulletin board notices in apartment buildings, offices, supermarkets and laundries. Other good places to look for used furniture include:

- Auctions
- Garage sales
- Good Will and Salvation Army stores
- Used furniture stores

Save money by doing some work on restoring furniture yourself. Can you refinish or repair some pieces? Upholster or slipcover others? With a little imagination, you may see a way to restyle some pieces. Some furniture may only need a good cleaning or a bit of repair to be useful again. Do you have the skills and tools needed to do the work? Big repairs can make a used piece of furniture too expensive unless you can make them yourself.

What To Look For...

Look below the surface--always. Check the framework to see how well it is put together. Check the quality of a chest by removing one or two of the drawers and looking at the inside corners of the chest frame. Wood corner posts are a sign of good quality. Push gently against the furniture. A good frame will not give or creak.

Drawers should pull out smoothly and easily. Handles should be smooth and easy to grasp. Drawer pulls should be fastened securely with screws or bolts.

While you have the drawers out, see if the sides and bottoms are in good condition. The center guide--the wood strip going from front to back along the underside of a drawer--adds strength to the chest and helps to keep the drawer from jamming. Very old furniture may have dust panels between the drawers. These panels add strength and protect against dust.

Now put all the drawers in place and step back to see if they fit squarely in the openings. If the drawer sags in front because of wear where the drawer slides in and out, try raising the drawer slightly. If this helps, you can correct the problem by a thumbtack or two on the frame.

Are the drawers painted or varnished? Unfinished wood swells in damp weather. This causes drawers to stick. If furniture has been made of green wood, the drawers may become loose and fit poorly as the wood dries out. Feel the edges of the drawers. They should be smooth.

Look carefully at the legs of furniture, especially if they are small. Tables should be rigid and well-balanced. Turn small tables and chairs upside down to see how the legs are attached. Wood or metal corner braces where the legs fasten on help to make the furniture stronger. Rungs or stretchers also help to support the table and chair legs. If they are broken or loose, decide if you can fix them before you buy.

Sit on a chair or sofa to see if it's comfortable. Is it lumpy or do any springs poke up higher than others? Check the underside of upholstered furniture to see that the frame and springs are in good condition. Springs should be evenly spaced.

Look at the cushions and back. Lumpy cushions can be replaced, but if the back is bumpy and uneven, the fabric will have to be loosened and the springs and padding reworked. Can you make the repairs? Notice the shape of the cushions and the sofa or chair. Find out if you can buy slipcovers to fit. Or, can you make slipcovers? Well-fitted covers add years of life to upholstered furniture and come off to be cleaned.

Linda Reece Adler, M.A., Extension Home Furnishings Specialist
Carroll Fackler, Superintendent, UK Wood Unitization Center, Quicksand