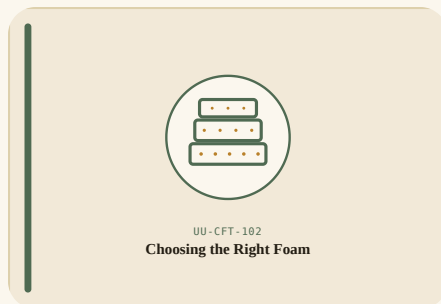


Choosing the Right Foam: Density, ILD, and Durability

The two independent specs that actually describe a foam, and how to match them to how a piece will really be used.



1. Two numbers that actually describe a foam

Foam is specified by two independent numbers that customers (and plenty of shops) tend to conflate: **density** (lb/ft³), which drives durability and shape retention, and **ILD/IFD** (lb), which measures firmness. A foam can be dense and soft, or lightweight and firm — they don't move together.

Density and firmness are independent specs. A customer who says they want it "softer" is talking about ILD, not density — and swapping only the ILD, without checking density, is how a cushion ends up soft on day one and collapsed within a year.

2. Matching foam to application

APPLICATION	GUIDANCE
Everyday seating (sofas, dining, high-use chairs)	Favor higher density for shape retention over years of daily compression
Back cushions, lower-load areas	Lower density is acceptable — less compression cycling than seat cushions
Marine / outdoor	Closed-cell or marine-specific foam, resistant to moisture retention and mildew
High-end / long-service-life pieces	Layered or wrapped constructions (firmer core, softer wrap) deliver both support and surface softness

3. Why showroom softness doesn't predict year three

A foam's initial hand-feel in the showroom says little about how it will perform after thousands of compression cycles. This is governed by **compression set** — how much a foam fails to spring back to its original thickness after repeated loading. Two foams that feel identical new can diverge sharply in how they perform after a year of daily use if their compression-set performance differs.

4. Setting expectations with the customer

- Ask how the piece will actually be used (everyday family seating vs. a formal rarely-sat-in room) before recommending a density.
- Be clear about what reupholstery vs. foam replacement each buys — a new cover over tired foam will look good for a matter of weeks before the old foam's wear becomes visible again.
- Let customers test-sit foam samples rather than quoting raw ILD numbers at them — the number means little without a reference feel.

Sources

General trade reference reflecting standard foam industry terminology (density and ILD/IFD). Specific foam products vary by manufacturer — confirm current specs and compression-set performance data from your foam supplier.

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