

Stocking the

Linen Cupboard



THE bride stocking a linen cupboard for her new home and the homemaker replenishing her household linen supplies have several problems in common. The homemaker certainly knows her requirements, whereas the bride may be uncertain about the quantities of each article that she will need to buy. Each, however, has to decide how much she can afford to spend and will have to plan her purchasing accordingly. In this article Betty Johnston, Field Officer in Rural Sociology, Department of Agriculture, Wellington, discusses the important points involved in budgeting for and buying household linen.

BEFORE buying household linen it is advisable to make out a rough budget, as the amount of money available largely controls the quality and quantity that can be bought.

The next step is to choose colour schemes. Bed linen, towels, and tea towels are no longer a staid and useful white, but are appearing in a wide variety of colours and designs which may be chosen to match the colours of bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen. Pastel-coloured sheets may be teamed with blankets of the same shade to emphasise or complement a colour scheme, and white sheets with a coloured border and matching white blankets bound with coloured satin make a more subtle contribution to colour harmony.

Striped bed linen has made news overseas, and small quantities have been imported into this country. Linen and cotton must be dyed with good dyes, or their colours will wear off with constant friction (this is known as "croaking") and in laundering. The best safeguard against this is to buy a good quality of a well-known brand. The guidance of a salesman in a firm with a good reputation may usually be relied on, for it is to the advantage of his firm to preserve its good name by providing reliable goods.

A good-quality cotton or linen which will wear well is closely woven and fine in appearance. The surface is smooth and even, and when the material is pulled it will stretch only very slightly. When a good material is held at eye level very few tiny

hairs will show, but a poor-quality one will be quite hairy. Linen fibres are long, and when spun into yarn and woven give a fabric which has a smooth, glossy appearance and is hard wearing, reasonably dirt resistant, and launders well. A good-quality cotton, however, costs less, will wear and launder quite well, and is a good choice for most households.

Wherever possible the best quality should be bought, as the cheaper grades are often made from inferior yarns which have a shorter life and do not stand up well to the wear and tear of everyday household use.

Other considerations are involved, too. The finest quality linen sheeting is often scarce and very expensive. Though it may be used regularly for years without showing signs of wear, and though one linen sheet will probably outlast two cotton sheets and in the long run cost no more than a cotton pair, the immediate cost may be too great for a slender budget despite the linen's obvious advantage in quality, so a compromise will be necessary.

The expense of setting up house is considerable and the shopper might well pause for thought before buying sheets, towels, and the rest of her linen. The numbers of each item will vary according to the size of the household, laundry facilities, and the amount of entertaining done. Those who have small children realise how necessary it is to have a reserve of sheets, towels, and pillow-cases for

emergencies such as sudden illness or prolonged wet weather.

The list given here is intended as a guide for those setting up house, but individual requirements will probably vary slightly.

MINIMUM LINEN FOR A NEW HOUSE

- Sheets: 3 pairs for each bed. For beds not in regular use 2 pairs should be sufficient
- Pillow-cases: 3 for each pillow. If there is sufficient money left after the rest of the linen has been bought, it could be wisely invested in extra pillow-cases and tea towels, as these items need to be replaced frequently
- Blankets: 4 for each bed
- Bath towels: 3 for each person. Two or 3 spare bath towels for each guest
- Face towels: 3 for each person and guest
- Guest towels: 4
- Bath mats: 2
- Table cloths: 3 (1 large white one and 2 smaller coloured breakfast cloths)
- Table mats: 1 or 2 sets. These need not be linen. Hardboard or rattan make attractive, hard-wearing, easily cleaned mats which save much laundry time
- Table napkins: 3 for each person
- Roller towels: 3; it is suggested that 3 more towels be bought as soon as possible, as these towels need frequent washing and soon wear out
- Tea towels: 8 heavy grade and 4 finer ones for use with glass

Bed Linen

Sheets or pillow-cases may be coloured or plain; the type of fabric depends on individual needs and preference. Cotton, linen, and rayon or mixtures of these fibres (unions) are all used for making bed linen, and overseas, nylon has been tried as sheeting. The most popular choice in New Zealand is cotton.

Weave is a factor in the lasting quality of sheeting. A loose, open weave will soon show signs of wear, especially if the yarn is flimsy. Plain