

How to Choose the Right Hot Tub Cover

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Some products provide critical functions that are just not glamorous. Spa (hot tub) covers – like automobile tires are two examples. Tires and spa covers aren't exciting to look at, yet both perform a vital function. As important as it is that the right tire is on the right car so it is with covers, and spas.

A spa cover serves a very important operating function. It conserves heat, thus saving energy and operating costs. Cleanliness and safety are also important reasons for keeping a hot tub covered when not in use.

Today's rigid vinyl spa cover was developed through several generations of engineering. In fact the first designer was Jon Watkins, founder of Hot Spring Spas, who had a vision for a cover that would promote energy savings and heat conservation. He was driven to deliver a hot tub that was extremely energy efficient, and, more efficient than any other brand available. Thus the birth of the hot tub cover you see today.

Nature can be brutal to a spa cover – since most spas are subjected to the outside elements, it's important that your spa cover is built to withstand everything that nature offers. Whether you are selecting your hot tub, or already own one, it's important to know how a good cover is built.

At first glance, like automobile tires, many people think all spa covers are alike. It's easy to fall into that assumption because most covers are made from a type of vinyl, are often the same rust color, have straps and handles and are filled with foam encased in plastic. Yet there can be critical differences between the performance of spa covers, just as with tires.

Unlike tires vinyl spa covers are handcrafted, and each vinyl covering is individually sewn. The craftsmanship is critical to the life of your cover and what lends added beauty to your spa when it's not in use.

From the outside, in, let's explore the anatomy of a fine-crafted spa cover that you can depend on. We'll look at the four main components, and then what holds it all together, as well as warranty and dealer support. You should ask your dealer for a checklist of features and a drawing that shows how their cover is built. ([hyperlink here to your website with HSS cutaway](#)).

FOAM CORES are the heart of the cover.

The heart of the spa cover are the Foam Cores. The foam cores provide strength, rigidity and insulation - the life of the cores are directly related to their strength and how the plastic that surrounds it is sealed. Ask your dealer to show you because an effective vapor lock seal around the foam core will inhibit moisture penetration that can cause weight gain and breakage. for longer life. Adding a taper allows for efficient water runoff which is helpful in wet climates. Not all foam is alike, so it's important to know that quality leaders

use pure foam, not regrind. Most covers are built with a standard EPS foam core of 1.5 pound density, tapered 3.5" to 2.5", delivering excellent strength and insulation. A 2.0 pound density provides extra durability and insulation, especially for larger spas. The foam cores are only as strong as they are reinforced. Support is necessary at the midpoint (hinge) of the cover, for added strength along the spine of the foam cores. A minimum of 16 gauge non-corrosive, reinforcing channel will ensure long life even through repeated use.

VINYL COVERING Top to Bottom

Nature delivers some tough challenges to the vinyl – from exposure to sun, rain, snow, ice, dirt, chemicals and more. Better covers are encased with at least a durable 25-ounce marine-grade top vinyl that is treated to resist the impact of UV rays and extreme temperatures. Make sure it passes an accelerated UV test for 1500 hours of UV resistance, and is treated for mildew resistance, chlorine resistance, and a -40 degree cold crack. Since the top vinyl is what you most often see, keep it looking its best with proper maintenance for a beautiful appearance and years of maximum performance.

The bottom vinyl of the spa cover is subjected to the stress of chemical and sanitizer exposure day in and day out. The cover's bottom vinyl needs to be formulated to withstand normal exposure to these harsh conditions. Better covers are constructed with at least 16.5-ounce, scuff-resistant double-ply poly laminate "weft" material that has been treated with mildew and UV inhibitors and passes a -40 degree cold crack test. The weft structure is an interlocking of fibers that protects the foam core and its plastic seal. To help control water accumulation between the core and bottom vinyl, spa covers should have at least one or more bottom drain holes. A better cover manufacturer will dress the holds with a scratch resistant, color coordinating grommet, since when the spa is in use, the bottom vinyl is visible.

Hinge Heat Seal for energy efficiency.

When it comes to preserving energy efficiency of your spa, the hinge heat seal is one of the most critical points of a spa cover. A better spa cover will be designed to prevent precious heat loss at the hinge, where the two halves of the cover come together. Your dealer can show you. Without a seal at the outer edge of each side of the cover hinge, heat will escape. With a well built cover and an effective heat seal at the hinge, you can expect an R value of 12 to 13.

Fit and Finish

You want a cover that is built to last and will provide extra strength and long-term durability. Reinforcing the cover from inside out is critical to that assurance. Better spa covers are reinforced throughout the cover, in as many as 24 different areas with special attention to those areas that experience extra wear 'n tear. Stress points include the hinge, handles, zipper, zipper pocket, skirt and tie-down straps and each can fail if not properly reinforced. As with any custom-crafted product, the sewing thread and finish is important, not only to how the cover looks but to its strength and durability. Better covers are sewn with polyester thread that is treated with UV and mildew inhibitors, assuring years of withstanding harsh weather, chemicals and intense sunlight. Just as with the suit you purchase, the shoes you wear, or the briefcase or purse you carry daily, fine craftsmanship makes all the difference in good looks and good function. The strength and integrity of your spa cover is very much dependent on the materials used, and the craftsmanship.

The best fitting spa cover is designed to the specifications engineered and provided by your spa manufacturer. You can actually hear a “pop” when a fine fitting spa cover is removed from the hot tub. That assures you that the spa cover is cut to exact specifications, and combined with the hinge heat seal, is providing the absolute best heat seal for energy efficiency.

Safety and Layers of Protection

While no single device can keep children safe, there are several layers of protection you can employ when you own a spa. Make sure your spa cover is labeled as a safety cover, and meets the ASTM Safety Cover Standard F1346-91. In accordance with this standard, a spa cover must have a minimum of four reinforced tie-down straps and locking hardware with keys to help keep unsupervised children out. Be sure to keep your cover closed and tie-down straps engaged and locked when the spa is not in use. Snug fitting tie-down straps are important for a good fitting cover, assuring a tight seal, and a secure, safe spa when not in use. Some manufacturers make adjustable tie-down straps which allow modification to the length to accommodate shrinkage over the life of the cover.

After sale protection and support

A better cover will give you 3-5 years of life, and sometimes more, depending on the environment in which it is placed and how it is cared for. Warranties run from 2 years or more, prorated and non-prorated. A better warranty will be non-prorated and assure you the cover will be free from defects in materials and workmanship, both on the vinyl encasement, and the foam core, for the period stated.

The three keys to your making a successful cover purchase are: is the cover built well, will it last, and if there are problems, who will be there to help you. That's where your local dealer comes in. It's ideal to build a relationship with the dealer who sold you the spa in the first place. Why? Because the local dealer is knowledgeable about your spa and the cover, and will send a technician to your home to help you solve any problem. They can also order you an original factory replacement, which means it will be built to exacting specifications. Also your local dealer has an established relationship with the manufacturer, and

investment in working with you and helping your community. So, wherever possible, we suggest that you purchase from your local dealer. When you visit with your local dealer you know what spa cover you are getting and you know how they will take care of you.

Options and Accessories

Color – Your new spa and spa cover are color coordinated for a fine, finished package that complements your backyard and home environment. Some models include color options for the cover. If you are replacing your cover, you can check with your dealer to see what colors your spa manufacturer has available. Most people decide they like the original color.

Densities-Some aftermarket manufacturers offer a choice in density and taper of the foam core. Typically, if you have purchased a high-end spa, your cover comes with the superior options already. So when it's time to replace, assuming you have enjoyed your cover, ask your dealer to replace it with the original factory equipment.

Cover Care – It's important to keep your cover clean and the vinyl conditioned, as over time, vinyl can become dry and brittle and fade. Most spa manufacturers offer and recommend a cover care product. Ask your dealer for their recommendations and options. If they offer something other than the manufacturer recommended product, make sure the ingredients will not harm the vinyl.

Cover Removal Systems – Enjoy your spa completely and make it easy on yourself to take the cover on and off. Many manufacturers offer cover assists. Some design their own that work specifically with their cover and spa model. Your dealer can recommend the right system for your spa and cover.

20 Questions to Ask When Purchasing a Cover

1. What kind of foam is in the cover? What is the density, and taper?
2. Specifically how is the foam core sealed?
3. How is the hinge reinforced? What material is used?
4. What is the expected R-value of the cover?
5. What kind of material is used for the top covering? What are the specifications, and how is it treated for UV and mildew?
6. What kind of material is used for the bottom covering? What are those specifications? How is it treated for UV, mildew and cold?
7. How is excess water drained out of the cover?
8. Is it labeled a safety cover? Is it in compliance with the ASTM Standard?
9. How many tie-down straps are on the cover?
10. Does each cover come with child-resistant locking hardware and keys?
11. What keeps the heat from escaping at the hinge area?
12. Is the cover internally reinforced? If so, how many places and where?
13. What kind of thread is used and how is it treated?
14. What is the expected life of the cover?
15. Is the cover warranted? Please explain.
16. How should I care for the cover? Any special guidelines for winter?
17. What is the best way to get the cover on and off?
18. What are the most popular colors?
19. How long has the manufacturer been making the covers?
20. Why should I purchase from a dealer versus on the Internet?

Spa Cover Care Tips

DO

- Always lock cover straps in place, to secure the cover when the spa is not in use.
- Treat your spa cover as you would a piece of custom crafted furniture.
- Use only the reinforced handles to move your cover. Straps, flaps and seams can tear if you use them like a handle.
- Clean and condition your spa cover on a monthly basis. It's always good to do this before the start of a new season.
- Remove snow buildup to avoid breakage of the foam cores.
- Maintain proper water chemistry. It will extend the life of your cover and your spa!

DO NOT

- Drag or lift the spa cover using either the flaps or the cover lock straps.
- Walk, stand, sit, or jump on the cover.
- Place anything on the cover, or place any type of plastic tarp or drop cloth over the cover. This may result in melted foam cores.
- Leave foam cores which have been removed from the vinyl encasement in the sun.
- Use any cover systems, chemicals or cleaners except those recommended by your manufacturer.
- Allow children on top of the cover, or alone in the spa without parental supervision.
- Allow pets to jump on, chew on, or claw on the cover.

Care Tips are courtesy of Hot Spring® Spas

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