

Umbrellas

UMBRELLAS

Umbrellas are available in a wide range of colors, styles and designs. They are used as protection from rain or sun. The word umbrella comes from the Latin word *umbra*, meaning shade or shadow.

Parts of the Umbrella

Umbrellas are composed primarily of three sections: the canopy, the shank, and the handle.

The **canopy** is that part of the umbrella that spreads and protects the user from rain or sun. The material from which the canopy is made is stretched over metal ribs, which form the frame for the canopy. These ribs arch radially and impart the desired shape to the canopy. The ends of the canopy are stitched to rounded tips that slip over the ends of the ribs and hold the canopy in place. A tape attached to the canopy may be wound around it and fastened or a sheath may be slipped over the umbrella. **Spreaders** or **stretchers** are attached at the center of the ribs to enable the canopy to be opened or closed.

Between the canopy and the handle is a shaft (if wood) or rod (if metal). Over the shaft is a metal sleeve that slides up and down and enables the spreaders to which it is attached to be opened or collapsed. Two small springs, which can be depressed into the shaft by slight finger pressure, hold the sleeve in position. Some umbrellas have push-button, self-opening spreaders that operate with a hidden spring. A metal or plastic cup that fits over the tips of a closed umbrella may be affixed to the shank.

A rigid handle enables the user to hold the umbrella. Straps or cords are frequently attached to umbrellas so that they can hang over the wrist or shoulder. Many umbrellas also have carrying cases, pouches or loops.

Special Construction Features

The number of ribs in an umbrella differs, depending on the size of the umbrella, its construction, and its shape. The sturdiness of the ribs determines the quality of the umbrella. Self-opening umbrellas usually have 7 to 8 ribs; folding umbrellas usually have 8 ribs; umbrellas for young people usually have 8 ribs; slim umbrellas usually have 10 ribs; and other styles may have 16 ribs.

To stand up to the wind, umbrella frames must be strong yet flexible. The same rib material should be able to give, but spring back to its original form.

Materials Used for Umbrellas

The canopy is made from fabrics or plastics that are water repellent. Cotton is frequently used; it must be closely woven and may or may not have a plastic finish to increase its protective qualities. Teflon, a light-weight, quick-drying, coating is common. Gloria, originally a cotton and worsted combination but now a silk or rayon and cotton fabric, is a tightly woven, plain weave material commonly used in men's black umbrellas. Drill, a twill-weave cotton is often used for beach umbrellas. These materials are often colorfully dyed or printed.

Silk, acetate, rayon, and nylon make rain- and sun-resistant fabrics for umbrellas. Transparent umbrellas may be made from vinyl plastic. Outer sheaths may be made from the same material as the canopy or from leather or plastic.

The larger the canopy the more susceptible it is to the wind. The fabric in a parasol, which is used to provide protection from the sun, does not have to be water repellent and may be organdy or lace.

The ribs and spreaders are usually made of grooved metal. Steel is most commonly used for these parts. Better umbrellas have very sturdy steel ribs and spreaders. Brass plating for inexpensive umbrellas and chromium plating or enameling for more costly umbrellas keep the steel from rusting. Solid brass ribs and spreaders add to the sturdiness of the frame.

The shaft is made from wood; if made from metal (aluminum), it is called a rod. Shafts are often reinforced with fiberglass for strength and lightness. The tips are made from metal or plastic. Handles are made in a wide range of materials, such as woods, plastics, bone, horn, cane, bamboo, leather, or metal. They may be carved, studded with jewels, engraved, or hand painted. The most common shapes for handles are the **crook** (shaped like a question mark), the **straight**, the **golf**, and the **opera**. Umbrellas may have braided cord, leather, or plastic straps; beads; or chains that permit easy carrying.

Some Types of Umbrellas

Descriptions of various types of umbrellas follow:

Ballerina or Parasol: Dainty looking with ruffled edge that resembles ballerina's skirt.

Beach: Made from waterproof materials. Usually has gaily colored stripes or figured patterns. Center pole is usually made of wood, plastic or aluminum and is pointed on one end to fit easily into sand or soil. Size varies from 5 to 8 feet in diameter.

Bubble Shape: Deeply domed to cover the head and shoulders. Must be made of transparent material.

Folding: Ribs fold to permit umbrella to be reduced in size for ease in carrying or packing.

Golf or Sports: Large, colorful umbrellas with 8 ribs. Usually has alternating color panels in the canopy. The ribs are 27 to 35 inches long and the handle is correspondingly longer.

Child's: Approximately 15 inches in length, with 8 ribs. Often made in clear plastic or is colorfully decorated.

UV: Some umbrellas have sun protection ratings. A good sun umbrella has a UV rating of 50 or more.

Self-Opening: Push button works hidden spring that releases sleeve, pushing ribs into place. When closed, tip ends of ribs are held in place in metal or plastic cup.

Windproof: Can be snapped back into shape if blown inside out and will not break when pulled back into shape. Regular or folding style.

Wind-Resistant: Built for strength against the wind and can withstand fairly high winds without breaking or turning inside out.

Care of Umbrellas

SOME OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS:

Select type appropriate for intended use.

Select size in relation to use.

Closed size is important for some usage.

Folding (travel size is ideal for book bags, brief cases, riding buses, travel.

Shape may be important for use.

Plastic canopies may puncture.

Color may be selected to match raincoat, briefcase, etc.; to be easily identified; to not show soil; add color to dreary weather.

Strong, sturdy ribs are more durable and wind resistance.

Number and closeness of ribs may be indicator of durability,

Cost should be evaluated in relation to funds available, predicted loss, and intended use.

It is desirable to open a wet umbrella after use to allow it to dry thoroughly. This keeps the fabric from spotting and from wrinkling excessively. When dry, the umbrella may be rolled neatly and fastened shut or encased in a sheath. On a windy day the top of the umbrella should be directed into the wind to avoid its being blown inside out.

Price

Umbrellas range in price from \$3.00 to over \$200 and, for the most part, the price reflects the quality of the umbrella. Although, some people prefer to buy cheap and replace the umbrella when it breaks, those who've had to deal with a cheap umbrella in a rainstorm often choose to pay a little more to avoid having their umbrella flip inside out, drip water on their head, or fall apart just when they need it most.

Still, not many people are willing to spend more than \$50 or \$75 for an object that is easily lost or misplaced. Fortunately, there are quite a few reasonably good quality umbrellas available in moderate price ranges. Umbrellas are also available in various styles and choosing an umbrella may mean compromising one advantage for another.

The right umbrella is a balance between cost and quality, as well as convenience and durability. Spend the time to find a good quality, reasonably-priced umbrella and it will serve you well for years to come.

