



# Install your own seat covers

Get a new-car look in minutes

by Bob Lacivita and David Radtke

Seat covers don't just protect your seats from spills and the wear and tear of pets and kids. They also add a personal statement along with extra comfort, especially in extreme temperatures. But the best reason to install them is that, unlike the seats, they can be easily removed, thrown in the washing machine and reinstalled. In this article, we'll show you the basic installation techniques for a good fit, along with some buying information to help you choose the right seat cover for you.

Seat covers come in basically three levels: the universal fit, which we show how to install in this article; the semi-custom fit, which is a bit more tailored to your car seat's contours; and the custom-fit, which is made more exacting to your car's seat specs and has a separate back, seat and headrest cover (photo below). The prices vary considerably, but you can expect to pay \$30 to \$50 for universal fit, up to about \$100 for semi-custom and up to \$200 or more for custom covers. Most auto parts stores stock only universal fit covers, so if you want more choices, look in the Yellow Pages under "Auto Seat Covers" for custom upholstery, or check the Buyer's Guide at the end of this article for Internet and catalog buying.



**1** Remove the headrest. Most models have a release button; others may need a slim screwdriver or putty knife to release the catch.



**2** Determine which cover is the driver's and which is the passenger's side (most universal covers are the same). Slip the cover over the back and wiggle it down like a tight sweater until the top fits snugly.



Custom seat covers can be ordered in a wide variety of fabrics and colors. The seat back, bottom and headrest are fitted separately with draw cords.



**3** Push the elastic straps through the gap between the back and the seat bottom.







**4** Cut a wire coat hanger and bend a hook on the end. Push it gently under the seat from the back (watch for wires or hardware below) and catch one of the elastic loops.




**5** Pull the loops one at a time under the seat and attach the back straps to the front with the S-hooks provided. Wear safety glasses because the hooks can fly if they slip from your fingers. Fit the straps on the sides using the same method.

**6** Mark the headrest locations by feeling for their position through the cover. Stretch the cover above the seat and make a 1/2-in. cut at each mark. Be careful not to cut the seat below.



## CAUTION

Don't install seat covers if your seats have built-in air bags. If you're not sure if your seats are equipped with air bags, check with your dealer.

When ordering seat covers, you'll need to tell the manufacturer the make, model and year of your vehicle and describe the style of seat: high back buckets, low back buckets, bench seat, headrests, etc. You'll also have to choose from several styles as well as many types and colors of materials. Many custom-cover manufacturers will even send you fabric samples. Many seat cover manufacturers require that the rear seat covers be professionally installed because of the difficulty of fastening them. Front seat covers, however, are fairly easy to install with little or no experience. The biggest problem is getting the straps hooked under the seats (see **Photo 4**). Look for obstructions like rail slides and release levers that can grab the straps and the jamb. Most seat covers can be installed in less than an hour without special tools. Follow the steps shown for basic universal-fit seat covers. 

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## Buyer's Guide

The following are good places to start when ordering seat covers. An Internet search will also bring you a wide variety of suppliers and manufacturers.

J.C. WHITNEY CO.: (800) 603-4383. [www.jcwhitney.com](http://www.jcwhitney.com)

SEAT COVERS UNLTD: (800) 255-8086. [www.seatcovers.net](http://www.seatcovers.net)

