

## Tarpaulins Explained- A Guide for Purchasing, Using and Repairing.

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A [tarpaulin](#) is a large sheet of flexible, water resistant or waterproof material that can have numerous uses. Most modern tarpaulins are made of polyethylene due to their durability and low cost, although cotton canvas and PVC tarps are also available for those looking for a more heavy duty item. Most tarpaulins come with metal or reinforced plastic eyelets at regular intervals along each side to form attachment points for rope, bungee or other fixings. This means tarps are ideal as temporary coverings for a variety of different large objects. When selecting a product to purchase, it's important to know that manufacturers advertise tarpaulins with their 'cut size'. The actual size of the product will be slightly smaller to allow for seams and reinforced edges, so it's a good idea to buy a slightly larger size than required to ensure it's fit for purpose.

The majority of manufacturers categorise tarps into several different types to allow for easy selection depending on the task at hand, however some differentiate using a simple grams per square metre or 'GSM' measurement. The higher the GSM, the more durable and puncture resistant the tarp will be. But often with increased durability comes increased cost and weight, so product selection is vital.

The primary function of a tarpaulin is weather protection, either as a temporary roof, a cover for a market stall, or to protect heavy machinery and agricultural materials. If using a tarpaulin for temporary roofing, it's best to use a heavy duty tarp that's adequately supported from the inside, and the tarp should be fixed tight enough to prevent potentially damaging wind intrusion and standing water. If your intended use is covering vehicles or machinery, then a lighter duty economy polytarp may be sufficient. But if there's a high risk of any sharp edges puncturing the plastic then you may consider a thicker more durable material. For agricultural machinery, a vinyl tarp is an excellent investment. Normally over 500gsm, they are resistant to mildew, acid, grease and oil. This offers an excellent level of protection from industrial chemicals and fertilisers. There's a wide range of colour options available from most suppliers, so high visibility requirements can normally be catered for.

If you run a market stall, then the typical product is a striped or white tarpaulin offering excellent protection from the elements, whilst still allowing some light intrusion. They can be easily secured to frames using [6" metal clamps](#) or similar fixing. And to protect your goods whilst allowing clear visibility, you may choose a tarpaulin constructed from clear polyethylene or PVC.

As with all applications, it's important to ensure that retaining force is spread evenly over the full surface of the tarpaulin and not just the eyelets. Eyelets are not designed to take the full weight of the tarp and may sustain damage with excessive force. Bent or misshapen eyelets can usually be repaired at reasonable cost with a widely available repair kit and adhesive tape. Some tarpaulins require regular reproofing to maintain water resistance; always ensure you follow storage instructions to prolong your covers lifespan and avoid mildew forming on the tarp.