

General Tips For At-Home Laundering

Wash in cold water.

Hot water wears out fabrics more quickly. Save the hot water for really soiled loads—kids' baseball uniforms, gardening clothes, dirty sheets—and wash everything else in cold. Even if a garment says wash in hot water, washing in cold won't hurt it (washing a cold water garment in hot, however, can be damaging). Your clothes will be just as clean, and the threads will stay strong. Check out Tide Coldwater, a specially formulated liquid detergent for cold water washing.

Invest in a front-loading washer.

Most Americans use top-loading washers, which have an agitator inside that pulls your clothes around. Front-loading washers use gravity to tumble clothes in and out of the water, much like the motion of a dryer. This is much gentler on your clothes and helps prevent to prevent snags and tangling.

Wash clothes inside-out.

Protect the important part of a garment—the outside—by simply turning it inside out before you toss it in. It may not seem like much, but embellishments on the outside of a garment, even screen printing, can be worn away or snagged by the inside of the washer. Items with beading, embroidery, appliqués and other details should always be washed inside-out.

Don't use chlorine bleach.

Vinegar is a natural brightener that won't wear out the fibers of your clothing the way chlorine bleach will. Plus, it's better for the environment—we love that.

Air dry.

Dryer heat damages fabric over time. Electric dryers cause shrinkage, color fading, and weaken the material fibers. Instead, line dry clothing outside, or indoors on a drying rack. You can also hang garments on plastic hangers in your shower or on a tension rod in an alcove. If you simply can't air dry, use the lowest heat setting on your dryer.

Follow care label directions.

Most people know they should read garment care labels, but something many people forget is to read the directions on their laundry detergent too. Don't use too much—too many suds means the rinse cycle might not get all the soap residue out of your clothing. And use the right kind—gentle detergents for delicates, and regular detergent for sturdier items.

Treat stains the right way, and right away.

A spill or stain doesn't have to ruin a garment—see our "Stain Smarts" section for directions on treating almost any kind of stain. Read the directions on stain removal products too, even if you have used them before. They may not be safe for every kind of fabric, or be recommended for every kind of stain.