

SORT IT ALL OUT

You've been programmed to wash bright-colored pieces separately from whites. And that's still a good rule, especially if it's indicated on the label.

But the experts say that **sorting by fabric is just as smart, if you want to be kind to your clothes.**

Give hardy items—towels, denim, twill, chinos—their own cycle. "These are tougher materials. When they're washed with finer cottons, they beat the heck out of them," says cleaning pro Brian Sansoni.

Group T-shirts, nightgowns, and other delicates in a different load.



While you're on a roll, find out the fastest way to neaten up the laundry room. For a printable checklist of steps, go to realsimple.com/laundryroom.

QUICK QUIZ

1. True or false: When washing in a top-loader using liquid detergent, you should first fill with water, then add soap, then add clothes.

ANSWER: False. This protocol from the past was meant to prevent residue on the fabric and the machine. But modern detergents are phosphate-free and not harmful to clothes the way old formulas were. As long as you're not using bleach, don't add clothing *after* the water (a pain, because clothes can float). Instead, use this order to distribute detergent best: clothes, then water, then soap.

2. To reduce lint, add 1/2 cup _____ to the rinse cycle.

- (a) Distilled water
- (b) White vinegar
- (c) Tea-tree oil

ANSWER: (b) The acidity of white vinegar prevents lint from sticking to fabric.

3. What do these items have in common? A T-shirt with a transfer design, an embellished swimsuit, and dark jeans.

- (a) They should all be line-dried.
- (b) They should all be washed in cold water.
- (c) They should all be washed inside out.

ANSWER: (c) Turning them inside out prevents fading and protects embellishments.

4. True or false: It's best to let a dryer "rest" for an hour before putting in a new load.

ANSWER: False. Running back-to-back dryer loads is smart and efficient. It lets you take advantage of retained heat from the previous cycle, cutting down on energy usage.

STAIN ANTIDOTES

Wash fabrics as recommended after these treatments—the sooner, the better. (See Oops! #1, below.)



COFFEE Stretch the fabric over a bowl and carefully pour boiling water through the stain from about a foot above. If the coffee had milk in it, follow with an oil solvent, like Carbona Stain Wizard Pre-Wash (\$4.50, soap.com). If it contained sugar, follow with a pretreatment product, like Shout Laundry Stain Remover (\$4.50, cvs.com), and let sit for 30 minutes before washing.



KETCHUP Apply Shout, then apply white vinegar with an eyedropper or a clean toothbrush to lighten the stain.

OOPS! #1

RUBBING STAINS FURIOUSLY This can make the stain worse and possibly wear away the fabric. Instead, be gentle and methodical. Treat the stain as soon as you can; the less time that elapses, the more success you'll have. And always use a white cloth so that colors can't transfer. Dab, rather than rub, working from the outside in to keep the stain contained.



CHOCOLATE Scrape off the excess with a plastic knife or a spatula. Spray with a dish-soap solution (1 tablespoon clear soap to 10 ounces water), then dab with an enzyme detergent before washing. (Most everyday detergents contain enzymes.)



MUSTARD Saturate the stain with white vinegar, then apply a dish-soap solution. (For the formula, see Chocolate, above.)



ICE CREAM Flush with cool water. Apply a prewash stain-removal product (like Shout), then soak in a sink filled with cool water and a few drops of detergent.



RED WINE Sprinkle salt on the stain, then stretch the fabric over a bowl and carefully pour boiling water onto the spot from about a foot above.



WHITE WINE Run cold water over the stain, then spray with a dish-soap solution (see Chocolate) and pretreat by dabbing with detergent.



BEER Soak in 2 cups cool water and 1/4 cup white vinegar.



GRASS Treat with Shout and let sit for 15 minutes. Use a clean toothbrush to rub in the solution.



MUD When the stain is dry, gently scrape off the excess with a plastic knife. Dab on a bit of water and some gentle detergent (like Woolite). Rub to form suds, then rinse. To lighten the remaining stain, apply a solution of 1 part water and 1 part white vinegar.



PERMANENT MARKER Apply Amodex Ink and Stain Remover (\$16, wayfair.com) to the area. Rub in with a clean, stiff-bristled toothbrush until the ink is almost gone.



INK To stop the stain from spreading, create a "dam" around it with petroleum jelly. Then apply isopropyl alcohol with an eyedropper or a clean toothbrush. Dab with a cotton ball and mineral spirits to remove any residue. (Open a window for ventilation.) Let dry. Rinse with a dish-soap solution (see Chocolate).

RS READERS' PRESSING QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

The experts (see page 157 if you want to send thank-you notes) tackle your baffling laundry scenarios.

Q. Any way to get Crazy Glue off a shirt? We've tried just about everything.

—T.C. Fuller

ANSWER: WD-40 to the rescue! This lubricant, normally used on creaky doors and rusty bike chains, dissolves all adhesives. Place the shirt, stain-side down, on a stack of paper towels. Spray with WD-40, and let sit for 5 minutes. Turn the shirt over, spray again, and remove the residue with a clean cloth. Rinse well, then machine wash.

Q. We get horrible static on our clothes. How can I make it go away?

—Lindsey Plessinger

ANSWER: Liquid fabric softener is your best bet. It adds a static-resistant chemical to fabric fibers, coating them completely, unlike dryer sheets. If your clothes are sticking to you while you're wearing them, just run the long side of a

OOPS! #3

WASHING AN ITEM THAT HAS A "DRY-CLEAN" LABEL

This isn't necessarily a blunder. Most items that say "dry-clean" can be hand washed and air-dried. This includes natural fibers, such as linen and most silks. First check for colorfastness; moisten a cotton swab with mild detergent and dab it on a hidden seam to see if any dye comes off. If not, go ahead and dunk the garment in soapy water just once or twice, then rinse and immediately roll it in a towel to extract moisture. However, you should stick with dry-cleaning for certain categories: leather, suede, silk dupioni, anything with embellishments, and structured pieces (like blazers).

wire hanger between your clothing and your body and then over your clothes.

Q. How can I get rid of that funky smell that workout gear develops no matter how you wash it—or how quickly you wash it—after wearing?

—Lisa Gentile

ANSWER: To curb the stench of synthetic gym clothes, rinse them immediately in the locker room, then

BLEACH SMACKDOWN

Which whitener is right for you? Clear up any questions with this side-by-side comparison.

| | THE UPSIDE | THE DOWNSIDE | USAGE TIPS |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| CHLORINE BLEACH | Packs the most powerful punch. It not only whitens but also disinfects and deodorizes. Can be used on every washable material except silk and wool. | Can weaken fabrics. (It's strong stuff!) You should wear gloves when you're using it and work in a well-ventilated area. | If your machine doesn't have a bleach dispenser, wait for 5 minutes before adding it to the wash water. Pouring it in before then may destroy enzymes and whiteners in the detergent. |
| OXYGEN BLEACH | Gentler and less toxic than chlorine bleach. Can be used on all washable garments, though it's best for colors. | Not as powerful as chlorine bleach. | Pour into the water before adding the clothes (unlike a regular wash, when clothes go first). Use warm or hot water; it's less effective in cold. |

wring out the excess water and place them in a plastic bag. As soon as you get home, machine wash with a detergent formulated for synthetics (like Win; windetergent.com) in the hottest water that the material can handle. (Check the label.) Still smelly? Consider switching to cotton blends, which release odors better than synthetics do.

OOPS! #4

NOT ZIPPING ZIPPERS ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP Metal teeth can snag delicate and woven clothing that's being washed in the same load.

CAN THIS ITEM BE SAVED?

Advice on what can be brought back to life—and recognizing what has gone on to the afterlife.

towels that are no longer absorbent

FIX IT: The most likely culprit is fabric softener. It can coat terry cloth with a waxy, water-resistant film that ruins the very mission of towels. To dissolve the buildup and restore the fluff, wash the towels the next few times with ¼ cup white vinegar added to the rinse cycle, and skip the softener in the future.

sweater with a bleach stain

FORGET IT: Sorry, you're out of luck. Your only choice is to dye the whole garment its original shade. Or, if the stain is tiny, try spot-dyeing with an eyedropper.

load of whites turned pink (that *@#%&! red sock!)

FIX IT: Soak the discolored stuff in a sink filled with water and bleach (10 parts water to 1 part bleach) or OxiClean (read the label for the

amount). Check every 15 minutes or so and remove when white; 90 minutes should be more than enough. Then machine wash. Still pink? Try Rit Whitener and Brightener (\$6.50, amazon.com).

shrunken wool

FORGET IT: This is *baaad*. Unless the wool has been treated (the garment label will indicate this), the fibers constrict in water. There really is no remedy.

load left sitting in the washer for 24 hours

FIX IT: Rewash the load with 1 cup white vinegar (and no detergent) to kill the mildew odor.

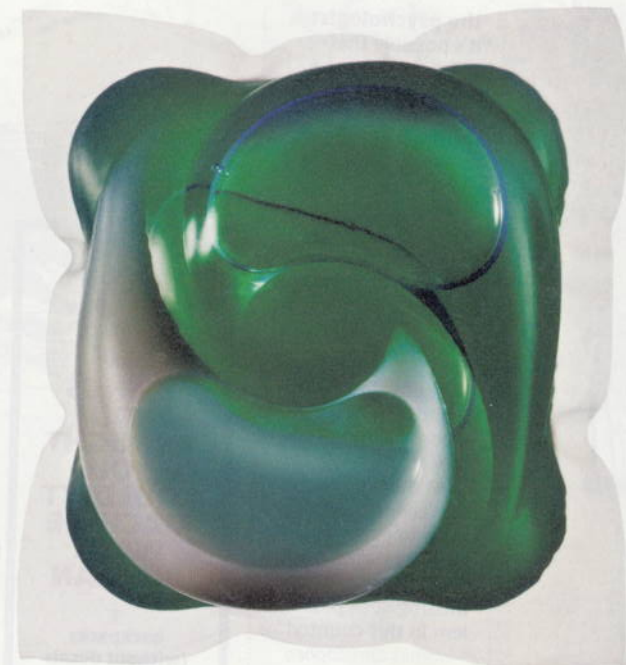
load left sitting in the dryer

FIX IT: Don't worry—the wrinkles haven't set in forever. Toss in a damp, clean hand towel and run the dryer for a few minutes. The steam created should relax the wrinkles.

WHAT IS THAT TAG TELLING YOU?

MACHINE WASH





WISDOM FOR THE WASHER

- 1 | Leave the lid open between uses. Air-drying will curb mildew growth.
- 2 | Pop in a bleach-free washer cleaner (like Affresh; \$10 for five, walmart.com) once a month to blast away odor-causing residue. Run the machine empty on a hot cycle.
- 3 | Make sure that your washer is level. Otherwise vibrations can damage your floor and prematurely wear out key components, like the shock absorbers and the tub bearings. (Plus, there's that terrible noise.) Place a level on top of the machine and adjust the feet, which typically screw up and down, accordingly. If this

▲ A NOD TO THE POD
Gel pods save you the trouble of measuring but are generally pricier per load than liquids.

doesn't help, beef up the floor with a ¾-inch-thick piece of plywood that's a little larger than the machine's base. It will help absorb vibrations.

4 | Washers typically come with black rubber hoses, which can blister and tear over time, causing a flood. Replace them, even if they look fine, with sturdier stainless-steel ones. "I tell everyone to do this because the steel ones will live as long as the washing machine, but rubber hoses typically last only two or three years," says Chris Hall, the president of RepairClinic.com. "All you need is a pair of pliers." (Try GE four-foot stainless-steel Universal Washer Hoses; \$22 for two, homedepot.com.)

3

TIPS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DRYER

1 use permanent press

This medium-heat cycle with a cool-down period at the end is a proven crease curber. Don't pack clothes in. They need to float freely or they'll wrinkle.

2 don't wait for the dryer to ding

You can skip ironing dress shirts, pants, and school uniforms by taking them out of the dryer 10 minutes before the cycle is done, when they're slightly damp. Give them a good shake and hang them up, pressing with your hands.

3 clean the machine

Even though you empty the lint filter after each use (right?), lint buildup can clog the duct over time and become a fire hazard. A sure sign that your dryer is clogged? It takes more than an hour to dry a load. Once a year, detach the hose from the back of the dryer and snake a long brush through to push out lint (20-foot dryer vent brush, \$30, gbindustrialdirect.com). Also scrub the lint filter once a year with a small toothbrush and a bit of detergent. Rinse, then air-dry completely.

TOP PICKS FROM A LAUNDRY PRO



COMMON GOOD LAUNDRY DETERGENT, LAVENDER SCENT

\$30 for 64 ounces (about 96 loads), commongoodandco.com

"This is a powerful, concentrated formula that's free of synthetic fragrances and dye," says cleaning expert Donna Smallin Kuper. "The bottle is a little shorter than most, so it's a great pick if you're tight on laundry-room space."



CALDREA ROSE-WATER DRIFTWOOD FABRIC SOFTENER

\$15 for 32 ounces, caldrea.com

"I started using this light, floral-scented formula on delicate items that need to be air-dried, but it works well as a wrinkle releaser, too: Fill a 16-ounce spray bottle with 2 cups hot water and 1 tablespoon of the softener, then shake to mix," says Smallin Kuper.

TIDE TO GO INSTANT STAIN REMOVER

\$3 at retailers nationwide

"This portable product is a lifesaver if you're prone to food or drink spills. It's super strong on all marks, except oily ones, erasing them or minimizing them until you get a chance to throw the item in the washer," says Smallin Kuper.



CALDREA BASIL BLUE SAGE DRYER SHEETS

\$10 for 80, caldrea.com

"This is a new favorite of mine. The beautiful rosemary, basil, and sage scent makes laundry feel like less of a chore," says Smallin Kuper.

OOPS! #5

OVERLOADING THE WASHER
Stuffing the machine can create wrinkles and prevent your clothes from getting clean. On top of that, it can put pressure on the machine's bearings and shock absorbers, causing them to wear down prematurely.



To download a symbol chart (post it in your laundry room for reference!), go to realsimple.com/laundrylabels.

SOCK SAVER!
Place socks in the washer tub first, so they're less likely to attach themselves to other garments.



INTO THE FOLD

Procrastinators take note: It really does eliminate creases if you fold clothes when they're still hot, right out of the dryer (or, if you prefer, right out of the pile that you dumped onto your bed).

Give each item a quick shake so wrinkles don't set in. Then improve your efficiency by creating loose piles according to type: for example, T-shirts, shorts, boxers. Fold your way through each pile. By handling one type of garment at a time, you'll get into a rhythm and work faster. And when you fold like items, your stacks are neater, so they're ready for dresser drawers. (Make piles by room, of course.) If you don't have time to fold a load immediately, shake out the pieces and lay them flat in the laundry basket, one on top of another, while they await further attention.

HEY, DOES ANYONE LINE-DRY ANYMORE?

Yes, some folks do. (Although there are also communities that actually ban clotheslines.) The benefit of hanging laundry? Less wear and tear (all that lint in the dryer trap is tiny particles of clothing), along with fresh-smelling items, energy reduction, and the natural bleaching of the sun. Here, three tips for working the line.

1. Hang clothes upside down to reduce stretching in key spots, like the shoulders.
2. Turn colored clothes inside out and place out of direct sunlight to minimize fading.
3. To avoid that crinkly, stiff feel, add ¼ cup white vinegar to the wash cycle; the acidity eliminates soap residue. If you're using a drying rack indoors, blow a fan on it to mimic a breeze. In winter this works like a humidifier!

MYSTERY OF THE MISSING SOCK

Maybe it's the navy knee-highs or your favorite hot pink anklets. You keep the one sock aside, awaiting the other's return. But, alas, it never happens. Where is the elusive sole mate? Four experts weigh in.

the philosopher

"They are sucked into a parallel universe where people wonder where the extra socks in their dryers come from."

—David L. Smith, professor of philosophy at the University of New England, in Biddeford, Maine

the psychologist

"It's possible that some socks have a foot phobia and are avoiding getting worn out of fear."

—Jennifer Hochman, Psy.D., clinical psychologist at the OCD Resource Center of Florida, in Fort Lauderdale

the conspiracy theorist

"I can cite credible evidence that the Laundromats are in cahoots with the sock makers. We must demand that our leaders take steps to overcome partisan differences and solve the missing-sock problem in this country!"

—James Christopher, middle-school history teacher in New York City

the technician

"I've taken apart hundreds of washers and dryers, and I can assure you: The socks are not in there. They won't fit through the vents. They're usually behind the washer, next to it, under it, or stuck to that dress in your closet that you never wear."

—Chris Hall, president of RepairClinic.com

OOPS! #6

WASHING SHIRTS ALL BUTTONED UP

This seems like a good idea, but it can stress buttons and buttonholes and lead to premature poppage. Take the time to unbutton before tossing clothes in the washer (or the hamper).

3 THINGS YOU THOUGHT YOU COULDN'T WASH BUT CAN

1 backpacks (without decals or adornments)

Turn inside out and remove any metal parts (aside from zippers). Place in a pillowcase, secure with a twist tie, and wash in cold water on a gentle cycle. Air-dry.

2 sports gear (like knee pads and shin guards)

Wash in cold water on a gentle cycle. Air-dry.

3 down and feather pillows

Wash on a delicate cycle. Make sure that they dry thoroughly in the dryer before using, as moist feathers can breed mildew.

After tumble-drying, place near an open window or a radiator for a few hours before covering with pillowcases.



**TAKE THE
PLUSH-TOY
PLUNGE**

If the labels say "washable," place a few stuffed toys inside a pillowcase secured with a twist tie, then wash in cool water and Woolite. Tumble-dry on cool.

THE EXPERTS

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