

if your dishwasher could talk

Here's what it would tell you to do to get your loads even cleaner.

Don't stress about choosing a wash cycle.

Unless you're filling the machine with pots and pans (there's a specific cycle for that), set it on the "normal" cycle. It'll run anywhere from 1½ to 3½ hours, depending on your machine, and can handle most jobs.

THEY'RE DISHWASHER-SAFE

Surprise! You can put these in (top rack only, please).



Garden tools



Baseball hats



Hard plastic toys

Dishes coming out crusty?

Start an empty washer on "normal." When it fills with water, open the door—you should see enough water to just cover the bottom. If there's less, the electric inlet valve, which lets water into the machine, may have malfunctioned. Check the manual to locate it. If it looks clogged or broken, replace it. (You can buy a new one online for \$20 to \$50.) It's an easy DIY fix.

I need occasional TLC

Food can gunk up the tiny holes in the propeller-like spray arm at the bottom of the machine, stopping water from reaching all your dishes. Clear them with a toothpick every month or so.

Load me up right.

Stack the dirtiest items on the lower rack, where they are closest to the spray arm and will get the most cleaning action, and mugs and glasses on the top. Spoons and forks should go right-side up in the utensil basket, knives with their blades pointed down for safety.

Don't waste time prerinsing.

Yes, you should scrape large clumps of food off your dishes, but manufacturers agree: You can let the dishwasher do the rest of the work!