

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Historical Materials from University of
Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Extension

1989

G89-922 Stain Removal for Washable Fabrics (Revised April 1999)

Rose Marie Tondl

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>



Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Tondl, Rose Marie, "G89-922 Stain Removal for Washable Fabrics (Revised April 1999)" (1989). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 1399.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/1399>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



Stain Removal for Washable Fabrics

Spaghetti sauce, ink and chewing gum are just a few of the things that can leave their mark on clothing. This NebGuide has suggestions for removing stains from washable fabrics.

Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist

- [Cleaning agents used in stain removal](#)
- [Wet spotter solution](#)
- [Dry spotter solution](#)
- [Guidelines to stain removal](#)
- [Stain removal techniques](#)
- [Stain removal guide](#)

Home stain removal done quickly and cautiously can decrease family clothing care costs. Clothing expenditures are reduced by minimizing the replacement of damaged clothing. The following instructions and techniques use normal home laundry products and readily available stain-removal agents. These procedures apply *only to washable items* and not to garments labeled **dry clean only**. Always check the care label for recommended laundering procedures and follow the instructions.

Cleaning Agents Used in Stain Removal

The following is a list of home laundry products and cleaning agents that can be used in stain removal procedures. Keep a variety of these products in the home.

- Amyl acetate (Banana Oil) or non-oily fingernail polish remover.
- Bar of soap. (Ivory®, Fels-Naphtha®)
- Bleach
 - Chlorine bleach — Identified by "hypochlorite" on the label.
 - Oxygen bleach — Identified by "perborate" on the label. Available in liquid or powder forms.
- Detergents — Available in liquid or powder forms.
 - Heavy-duty liquid for laundry
 - Light-duty liquid for hand dishwashing
- Dry-cleaning solvents (Carbona®, Energine®)
- Enzyme presoaks — Break down protein food stains.
- Glycerine — a weak solvent.

- Household ammonia — Ammonia is poisonous. Do not breathe the fumes.
- Prewash stain removers — Available in aerosol, liquid, pump and solid stick forms. Be sure to read the directions before using.
- Rubbing alcohol — Use rubbing or denatured alcohol.
- Rust remover — Whink®, RoVer®.
- White vinegar.

Wet Spotter Solution

Wet spotter is a combination of stain-removal agents used to remove many kinds of stains. To make your own, mix 1 Tbsp. glycerine, 1 Tbsp. liquid hand dishwashing detergent and 1/2 c. water. Store in a plastic squeeze bottle with a small cap. Label "**wet spotter**." Shake well before using.

Dry Spotter Solution

Prepare dry spotter by mixing 1 tsp. of mineral oil and 8 tsp. dry-cleaning solvent. Use solution to remove many kinds of stains. Label "**dry spotter**" and store in a tightly capped glass container to prevent evaporation of the solvent. *Dry-cleaning solvent is poisonous and may be flammable.*

Guidelines to Stain Removal

- Treat stains promptly. Fresh stains are easier to remove.
- If possible, identify the stain.
- Identify the fiber content of garment or item.
- Test stain remover on hidden part of a garment before treating the stain. If color is affected, do not use the product.
- Avoid excessive rubbing, which may damage fibers or finishes, remove color or spread the stain.
- Work from wrong side of the fabric, forcing the stain out of the fabric, not through it.

Take these precautions when using hazardous cleaning agents such as chlorine bleach, rubbing alcohol, ammonia, dry-cleaning solvent, amyl acetate and rust remover.

- Read and observe ALL warnings on the label. Carefully follow the instructions for the use, storage and safety of all cleaning agents.
- Work in a well-ventilated area.
- Use a small amount of cleaning fluid at one time and keep the bottle capped.
- Never mix cleaning agents. Poisonous gasses may be given off.
- Dry-cleaning solvent is poisonous and may be flammable. Follow precautions on label.
- When using flammable cleaning agents such as amyl acetate or dry-cleaning solvent, rinse the fabric with water before placing it in the washing machine.
- If solvent spills on your skin, wipe with a paper towel and wash skin immediately.
- If solvent spills on your clothes, change them at once and hang them outside until odor is gone.
- Rinse out stain removal products before washing.
- Do not use chlorine bleach on silk, wool or spandex fabrics. The fabric turns yellow.
- Do not mix chlorine bleach with ammonia.
- Do not use chlorine bleach if care label says "Do Not Bleach."
- Do not use fingernail polish remover on acetate as it will destroy the fabric.
- Launder the item according to care label instructions. Do not put item in dryer until you are sure the stain is removed. Heat may set some stains.
- Do not work near an open flame such as a pilot light because some solvents are flammable.

- Do not smoke around cleaning products.

Stain Removal Techniques

Sponging — Place the stain face down on absorbent, clean, white paper towels or cloth. Apply the stain remover sparingly to the stain with a clean, soft, lintless cloth. Avoid circling and spreading the stain. Use light, brushing strokes, working from the outside of the stain toward the center. When the stain is removed, place the sponged area between layers of dry, absorbent towels to speed the drying process.

Soaking — Put the item in cool water unless the stain removal procedure you are following specifies warm or hot water. Soaking aids stain removal. Soaking time may vary depending on the type of stain. Avoid soaking some colored items for a long time to prevent damage to the color.

Flushing — Place clean absorbent materials under the stain, than add the stain remover in small amounts with a medicine dropper. Give fabric time to soak in the fluid. Change the absorbent material as you flush out the stain. Rinse out the stain remover from the fabric with water.

Stain Removal Guide

Asphalt, Tar

Scrape excess from fabric with a dull knife. Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent. Rinse with water. Apply detergent to stain. Launder, using hottest water for fabric. Use chlorine bleach if safe for fabric.

Beverages (Wine, Alcohol and Soft Drinks)

Sponge with cool water. Soak for 15 minutes in 1 qt. of lukewarm water, 1/2 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. of white vinegar. Launder. If stain remains, soak in an enzyme presoak for 30 minutes.

Blood

Soak in cold water for 30 minutes. Wash with warm water and a detergent. If stain remains, soak in an enzyme presoak and lukewarm water for 15 to 30 minutes or apply a few drops of hydrogen peroxide. For old stains, apply a few drops of ammonia and wash with detergent.

Candle Wax

Scrape excess from fabric with a dull knife. Spray or sponge with dry-cleaning solvent, then rub with heavy-duty liquid detergent before washing. Pressing the wax between paper may set the candle dye more permanently by making it harder for the solvent to penetrate the wax. Launder using hot water and chlorine bleach if safe for fabric.

Catsup or Tomato-based Stains

Remove excess with a dull knife. Soak in cool water for 30 minutes. Work liquid dish detergent into the stain and launder in warm or hot water and chlorine bleach if safe for fabric. If stain remains, soak 30 minutes in enzyme presoak. Rinse and launder.

Chewing Gum

Rub with ice cube and remove excess with a dull knife. Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or prewash stain remover and rinse with water. Launder garment as usual.

Chocolate or Cocoa

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or treat with prewash stain remover. Rinse. Apply liquid dish detergent to stain. Launder using hot water and chlorine bleach if safe for fabric. If stain remains, soak for 30 minutes in enzyme presoak. Rinse and launder.

OR Bleach chocolate stains with hydrogen peroxide. Rinse with water and wash as usual.

Coffee, Tea (No Cream)

Soak in solution of 1 qt. water, 1/2 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. vinegar for 15 minutes. Rinse with water. If stain remains, sponge with alcohol or soak in enzyme presoak and warm water for 30 minutes.

Coffee with Cream

Pretreat area with prewash stain remover. Rinse. Rub in heavy-duty liquid detergent and launder in hottest water possible for fabric.

Cosmetics (Powder, Eyeliner, Shadow, Etc.)

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or use prewash stain remover. Rinse with water and air dry. Apply liquid dish detergent to stain and launder in hottest water possible for fabric.

Crayons, Wax

Remove excess with a dull knife. Place stained area face down on paper towels and spray with WD-40® lubricant. After a few minutes, turn over fabric and spray other side. Work liquid dish detergent into stain. Launder using hottest water possible and chlorine bleach if safe for fabric.

Crayon (in Load of Clothes)

Scrape off excess with a dull knife. Wash in hot, soft water with soap (Ivory®) and 1/2 c. of baking soda for 10 minutes. If stain remains, work in soap paste and run again for five minutes.

OR Take load to a dry cleaning coin-operated machine or to a professional dry cleaner and ask for bulk cleaning.

Cream, Milk and Ice Cream

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent, prewash stain remover or dry spotter (see recipe). Allow to dry. Rinse with water. Apply liquid dish detergent and launder in hottest water possible for fabric.

OR Soak in warm water and enzyme presoak for 15 to 30 minutes, then launder.

Deodorants, Antiperspirants

Soak in cool water. Apply detergent to stain and launder. If fabric is discolored, treat fresh stains with ammonia and old stains with vinegar.

Dye Transfer

Pretreat stain with heavy-duty liquid detergent. Rinse. Soak using oxygen bleach. If stain remains and fabric is white, soak garment in diluted chlorine bleach (1 part bleach to 3 parts water). Launder.

Note: Today's dyes cannot be made colorfast if salt or vinegar is used.

Egg

Soak in cool water with enzyme presoak for 15-30 minutes. Rinse and let dry. Rub in

detergent before laundering. If greasy stain remains, apply prewash stain remover and launder.

Fabric Softener

Dampen the area and rub with bar soap. Launder the garment as usual.

Fruits or Berries

Soak in 1 qt. warm water, 1 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. white vinegar for 15 minutes. Rinse. If stain remains, sponge with alcohol, rinse and launder. If color stain remains, launder using chlorine bleach if safe for fabric or use an oxygen bleach.

Grass

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent until the stain is removed. Rinse and dry. Spray on wet spotter and several drops of white vinegar. Rinse. If stain remains, sponge with alcohol and thoroughly rinse. Apply detergent to stain and launder. Add chlorine bleach if safe for fabric.

Gravy

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or use prewash stain remover. Rinse with water. Air dry, then apply heavy-duty liquid detergent to stain and launder.

OR Soak in warm water and enzyme presoak for 15 to 30 minutes. Launder.

Grease, Oil and Butter

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent, then air dry. Apply detergent to stain and launder.

OR Use prewash stain remover and launder.

Hair Spray

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or dry spotter. Rinse and allow to dry. Repeat until stain is gone. Rub with heavy-duty liquid detergent before washing.

Ink, Ball Point, Felt Tip Marker

Sponge on any of the following until stain is forced out: dry-cleaning solvent, alcohol, acetone or prewash stain remover. Let dry. Repeat if necessary. If any stain remains, apply heavy-duty liquid detergent and launder. Certain hair sprays are effective on ball point, but some may leave a gummy residue and perfume.

Lipstick

Apply dry-cleaning solvent or dry spotter. Blot with absorbent material. Continue treatment until color is gone. Rinse and air dry. Rub in liquid dish detergent and launder.

OR Use prewash stain remover and launder.

Mayonnaise, Salad Dressing

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or use prewash stain remover. Rinse with water. Air dry. Apply detergent to stain and launder.

Mercurochrome, Merthiolate

Soak in solution of 1 qt. warm water, 1 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. ammonia for 30 minutes. Launder.

Mildew

For fresh stains, wash in heavy-duty detergent and dry in the sun. If stain remains, sponge with hydrogen peroxide. Launder using oxygen bleach or chlorine bleach if safe for fabric. **OR** Moisten stain with lemon juice and salt. Set in sun to dry. Launder as usual.

Milk

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or dry spotter, or apply prewash stain remover. Rinse. Soak 30 minutes or longer in warm water and an enzyme presoak. Launder.

Mud

Let dry and brush off excess. Soak in a solution of 1 qt. warm water, 1 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. white vinegar for 15 minutes. Rinse with water. If stain remains, sponge with alcohol, rinse thoroughly and launder. Also may soak for 30 minutes in an enzyme presoak. Add chlorine bleach to laundry if safe for fabric. If a rust-colored stain remains, bleach with oxygen-type bleach.

Mustard

Scrape off excess with a dull knife. With medicine dropper, flush with dry-cleaning solvent. Let dry. Rinse with water. Apply wet spotter (see recipe) and ammonia. Rinse. If stain remains, launder with oxygen bleach.

Nail Polish

Apply nail polish remover, amyl acetate or acetone to back of stain over absorbent material. Do not use if fabric is acetate, triacetate or modacrylic. Rinse and launder.

Paint, Oil Base

Remove the paint before it dries. Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent. Rinse. If a thinner is recommended for the paint, treat stain with it. Work in liquid dish detergent and launder using hot water if safe for fabric.

Paint, Water Base

Remove the paint before it dries. Sponge with dry spotter. Soak stain in cool water. Apply detergent and launder.

Pencil Marks

Use an art gum eraser to erase marks. Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or apply prewash stain remover. Launder.

Perfume

Sponge or soak stain in cool water. If stain remains, soak 15 minutes in 1 qt. lukewarm water, 1/2 tsp. liquid dish detergent and 1 Tbsp. white vinegar. Launder.

Perspiration

Pretreat with an enzyme presoak. Apply detergent to stain and launder. Fresh stains: To restore color, apply ammonia. Rinse with water and launder. Old stains: To restore color, apply white vinegar. Rinse with water and launder.

Pine Resin

Use a solvent to remove oily content. Try paint thinner, mineral spirits or dry spotter. Use a paste of detergent and water on the remaining residue. Launder.

Rust

Apply a commercial rust remover. Follow manufacturer's directions. Rinse before putting item in the washer.

Use lemon juice and salt on stain. Spread in the sun to dry. Rinse and launder.

Scorch

If lightly scorched, wet stain with hydrogen peroxide. Let stand for several minutes. Keep area moist. Rinse. Rub in detergent and launder. A severe scorch can't be removed.

Shoe Polish

Sponge with dry-cleaning solvent or prewash stain remover. Rinse. Apply heavy-duty liquid detergent to stain and launder using hot water if safe for fabric. If stain remains, sponge with rubbing alcohol. Rinse.

Spaghetti Sauce

Apply prewash stain remover and wait 15 minutes. Keep moist. Launder as usual. If some stain remains, try equal parts of vinegar and water on stain or use an oxygen bleach when laundering.

Urine, Vomit and Mucus

Sponge or soak stain in cool water. Apply detergent to stain. Launder. If stain remains, soak in an enzyme presoak for 30 minutes. Launder using oxygen bleach.

Yellow Stains

Yellowing may appear on fabric due to the oxidation of soil and oil. It may occur when insufficient detergent is used; wash water temperature is too low; too much detergent is added and not rinsed out; or synthetics are washed in liquid dish detergent and cold water.

Wash clothing in a permanent-press cycle with hot water, cool-down rinse and 1 c. of water conditioner. If necessary, repeat using correct amount of detergent, oxygen bleach or chlorine bleach if safe for fabric.

File under: TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN

B-1, Care

Revised April 1999, 10,000

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.