

# Care for Fabric Home Furnishings

Cooperative Extension Service  
College of Agriculture and  
Home Economics



## Guide G-402

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Fabric home furnishings are both functional and decorative. They protect furniture from soil and wear. Fabric home furnishings also add color and design to the area in which they are used.

To keep fabric home furnishings looking their best and to make them wear longer, give them proper care. The care required will be determined by several factors:

1. Fiber content
2. Fabric construction
3. Fabric finishes

These factors, in addition to type of furnishing, should be considered when deciding how to care for each item. Read labels and hang tags for specific instructions.

## CLEANING GUIDELINES

You will want to establish a regular routine to care for fabric home furnishings. Here are some general guidelines to follow.

### Bedspreads, Coverlets and Dust Ruffles

Launder regularly to keep them fresh and dust-free. Follow care recommendations given on labels or hang tags. Bedspreads and coverlets that require drycleaning will stay clean longer if they are removed from the bed each night. Proper care is especially important after these furnishings are used by a person who has been ill.

### Curtains and Draperies

Brush or vacuum frequently to get rid of loose dust. When only lightly soiled, freshen them by tumbling in a dryer set on air-fluff with no heat. For heavier soil, launder according to label or hang tag instructions.

Often curtains and draperies are weakened by long periods of exposure to strong sunlight. To avoid further damage in washable curtains, wash them using a “delicate” or “gentle” cycle. Or, wash them in a special mesh bag or pillow case. If they must be dry-cleaned, alert the dry-cleaner to any possibility of sun damage.

### Fiberglass Curtains and Draperies

Do not launder fiberglass items in your washing machine or dryer. To clean them, place folded in water, with a mild detergent. Soak 15-30 minutes; swish gently to remove soil. Or, if soil does not have oil or grease, hang curtains or draperies on an outdoor drying line. Wash them by spraying with a hose.

Do not treat fiberglass items with bleach. They should not be twisted or wrung dry. Hang over a hanger or drying line and allow excess water to drip out. Rehang at windows while still damp. Do not iron.

### Table Linens

Launder frequently to prevent the accumulation of oily stains. When food or other stains occur, treat them as soon as possible using the pro-

cedures recommended for the stain type. Read labels and hang tags for specific care required by the fabric.

### **Upholstered or Slipcovered Furniture**

Brush or vacuum regularly; once a week is recommended. If cushions are reversible, turn them each week to prevent uneven wear. Do not remove zippered cushion covers from upholstered furniture. Separate cleaning or washing can cause shrinkage, damage to fabric backing or color change.

When upholstered furniture requires cleaning, use a shampoo or solvent cleaner. Follow the directions on the container carefully. Be sure to pretest the method you plan to use in an inconspicuous spot to check for discoloration, surface damage, or color fading or running.

If the furniture is slipcovered, it can be treated as upholstered furniture, or the entire slipcover—cushions, skirt and all—can be removed and laundered.

Avoid placing slipcovered or upholstered furniture where it will be exposed to direct sunlight. Direct sunlight can cause fabric damage and color fading.

### **PROPER STAIN REMOVAL TECHNIQUES ARE IMPORTANT**

There are many types of soil, stains and spots, which may occur on fabric home furnishings. Whatever the cause, remove all stains as soon as possible for best results. The technique used will be important in successful stain removal.

#### **Follow these basic procedures:**

1. Determine the type of stain—oil-based, water-based, combination of oil and water, or unknown origin.
2. Remove any excess material. Blot liquids up with a soft cloth, a white facial tissue or a white paper towel. Lift or scrape solids away with a spatula or knife.

3. Decide on stain removal method—solvent for oily stains or water solution for water-based stains. Test the method in an inconspicuous place to determine if fabric color change will occur.
4. When possible, work from the wrong side of the stain. This will prevent forcing the stain further into the fabric. Use a soft cloth, a white blotter pad, or a white paper towel under the spot to absorb the stain remover and the stain as it is forced out of the fabric.
5. Work from the outer edge of the stain to the center unless the fabric tends to ring. If it does, work from the center to the outer edge, using as little moisture as possible.

### **SOME CAUTIONS FOR PROPER CARE**

Here are some cautions to consider when cleaning fabric home furnishings:

1. Fabrics that have been treated with a durable or permanent-press finish have a tendency to hold oil-based stains. Do not delay in removing such stains or they may become permanently set. Pretreat the stain before laundering.
2. Do not treat isolated stains on an item if it needs a complete cleaning. This will cause unsightly contrasts. Spots should be specially treated before laundering the entire article.
3. Do not press stained fabrics—heat can cause the stain to be permanently set in the fabric.
4. When removing a stain from an upholstered article, use as little moisture as possible—water or solvent. Vacuum the area carefully after the spot is removed.
5. Avoid scrubbing a stained area. Excessive rubbing may stretch the fabric or damage its texture.

## SAFETY IS IMPORTANT TOO

Use all cleaning solvents with care. Some cleaning solvents are flammable and others are poisonous. Because of these characteristics, proper storage of these materials also is important.

For your protection, remember these points when using a cleaning solvent:

1. Use a small quantity at a time; keep the container covered.
2. Do not use solvent near an open flame or electrical outlet.
3. Work outdoors or in a well-ventilated room.
4. Do not add solvents directly into a washing machine.
5. Allow solvent to dry—then launder the article if possible.
6. Wash any spilled solvent off the skin and/or work area immediately.
7. Do not use carbon tetrachloride. It is extremely poisonous; the fumes can cause death.

For your protection, remember these points when storing a cleaning solvent:

1. Leave cleaning solvents in their original containers so you can refer to labels describing use and care.
2. Store all stain removers in a cool, dry place out of reach of children.
3. Do not store cleaning solvents near sources of flame.

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