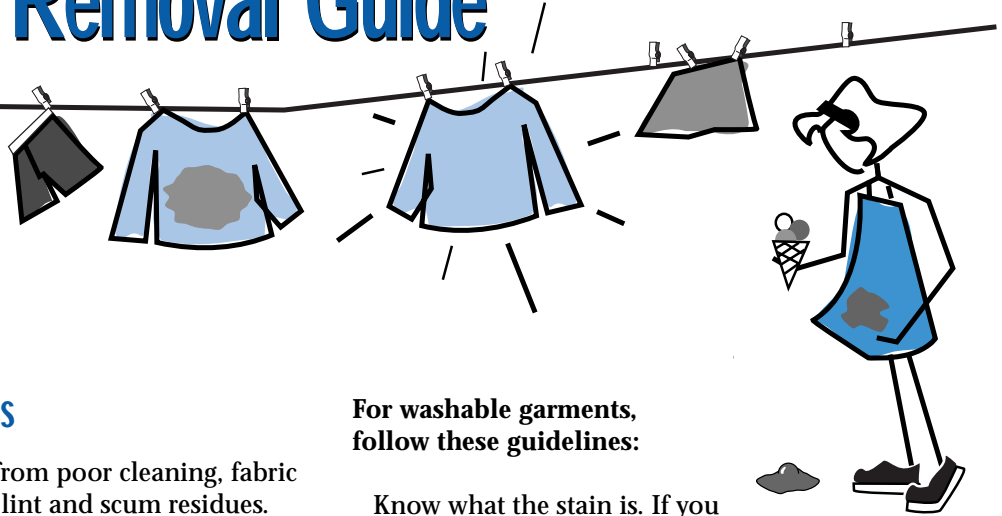




# Quick Stain Removal Guide

## Washable fabrics



Pamela J. Brown\*

## Preventing laundry problems

Most laundry problems result from poor cleaning, fabric damage, poor stain removal and lint and scum residues.

**You can prevent many of these problems if you:**

- ✓ Empty all pockets and close zippers, hooks and buttons.
- ✓ Sort the clothes into like stacks of colors, construction, fiber content, surface texture and degree of soil.
- ✓ Pretreat stains.
- ✓ Measure the amount of detergent recommended on the laundry container.
- ✓ Avoid overloading the washer and dryer.
- ✓ Use the hottest wash temperature recommended on the garment care label.
- ✓ Use the right wash and dry cycle for the fabric.
- ✓ Avoid using chlorine bleach on silk, wool or spandex or on non-colorfast garments.
- ✓ Remove clothes promptly from the dryer and avoid over drying.
- ✓ Regularly clean all filters on washer and dryer.

## Removing stains

Some stains need special treatment. First, read the garment care label (for information on care labeling, refer to

Extension publication  
L-5191, *Care Labels  
and Your Clothes*).



Take "dry-clean only" garments to a professional dry-cleaner.

**For washable garments, follow these guidelines:**

Know what the stain is. If you don't know, try to figure out the type of stain by its location. For example, food stains generally appear near the front neckline or on shirt cuffs; mud and dirt stains occur on the lower edges of pants and cuffs. Check for colorfastness.

Pretreatments can change a garment's color. Before using, test it in an inconspicuous area on the garment, such as a hem or seam allowance. Apply the pretreatment, rinse and note if the color changes. Remember: Fabrics are darker when wet. Sometimes a slight color change will not show until the fabric dries. If no change occurs, the pretreatment should be safe to use.

Over time, soil can build up on some fabrics, especially polyesters. A pretreatment product may actually super-clean an area, and may resemble a bleached spot. You can usually correct this by treating the entire garment with a prespotter or presoak and rewashing with extra detergent.

Treat the stain quickly. Time and heat exposure make removing stains harder. Use a blotting motion. Work from the inside of the garment or back of the stain to force the stain out rather than into the fabric. Avoid using a rubbing motion. Launder the whole item after treating.

## Laundry products

**Soaps** are mild cleansers that come in *granules*, which are used for lightly soiled and delicate items, or *bars*, which are good for pretreating heavy soils and stains before laundering. Avoid harsh rubbing with the bar.

**Detergents**, which come in *heavy duty*, *light duty* and *combination forms*, clean a wide variety of soils. Granular detergents are used on all washable fabrics. Liquids work on oily soils. Combination detergents contain detergents and either color-safe bleach or fabric softener.

**Bleaches** are strong cleaning agents. Follow the instructions on the containers. Use *chlorine bleach* on colorfast fabrics; it is most effective if added 5 to 6 minutes into the wash cycle. It is best to dilute it to keep concentrated bleach from splashing onto fabrics (for example, add 1/2 cup bleach to 2 cups water, then pour into the machine). Add *oxygen bleach* to the water with the detergent before adding clothes. Oxygen bleaches work best in hot water above 130 degrees.

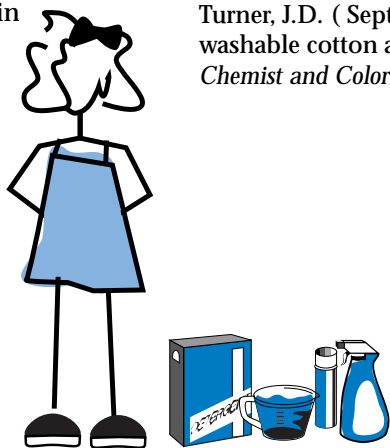
**Detergent boosters** strengthen the cleaning performance of detergents.

**Enzyme presoaks** contain a variety of ingredients to help remove stains and soils.

**Fabric softeners** make fabrics soft and fluffy and reduce drying time and wrinkling. There are *rinse types*, which should be diluted and added to the wash in the final rinse, and *fabric sheets*, which contain the same ingredients and create the same effects as liquid softeners, but should be placed in a cold dryer to avoid causing oily spots.

## Pretreatments

Pretreat stains quickly and repeat the application if the stain remains. Sometimes you need to treat stains many times. Never dry a stained garment in the dryer, or it may become impossible to remove.



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**There are several types of prewash stain removers:**

**Liquid and aerosol:** Apply to wet garment. Pretreat the stain and wait 1 to 3 minutes, then wash the garment. Leaving these products on the garment longer than recommended may cause color change or loss if the fabric dyes are unstable.

**Gel:** Apply as soon as possible to help prevent stains from setting. Apply up to a week before washing. Do not leave pretreatment gels on bright or fluorescent items more than a few minutes before washing. They may lose their color.

**Stick:** Leave on item for 3 or 4 days before washing.

## References

*Cleanliness Facts*. (1997). The Soap and Detergent Association, July/August. NY: New York.

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Turner, J.D. (September, 1995). Stain removal methods for washable cotton and cotton/polyester blend fabrics. *Textile Chemist and Colorist*.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agricultural and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward A. Hiler, Interim Director, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

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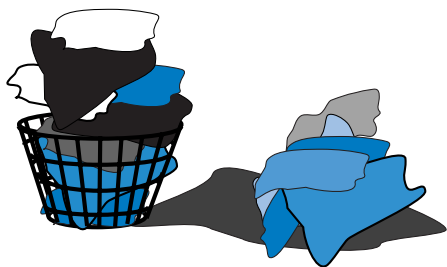
## Stain

## Type of Stain\*

## Steps in Treating a Stain

### Dye stains

Dyes from garments



Re-wash items as quickly as possible, do not dry items; apply liquid detergent, work into area and repeat. To wash with detergent, add 1 cup non-chlorine bleach, or if fabric is white or colorfast, use chlorine bleach or a commercial color remover, following directions on the package. Many current detergents include a color-bleed inhibitor to minimize this problem.

### Ink stains

Ballpoint, felt tip markers, liquid ink

Same procedure as for dye transfer. Apply pre-treatment stain remover to the area. Repeat process. Some inks may be impossible to remove. Laundering may actually set the ink.

### Oily stains

Vegetable oils, mayonnaise and chocolate, animal fat, motor oil, cosmetics including lipstick, and candle wax

Freely apply liquid detergent or prewash stain remover, work into the stained area, rinse hands and repeat. Machine wash at highest recommended temperature with 1 cup of detergent.

### Plant and protein stains

Egg, mustard, ketchup, mildew, meat sauce, grass, flavored drinks, blood, baby formula, dairy products, chocolate and body fluids

Freely apply liquid detergent, work into stained area, rinse hands and repeat. Wash with one cup of detergent, add 1 cup of non-chlorine bleach with enzyme presoak. If stain remains, soak item for 1 or 2 days, stir water occasionally. Machine wash again. Air dry.

### Rust

Deposits from water

Use a commercial rust remover. Follow the instructions carefully. Rinse well. Do not use chlorine bleach; it makes the stain more intense.

### Soil stains

Mud and dirt

Air dry the soil, brush or vacuum to remove excess soil. Apply a paste of detergent granules with warm water, work into the stained area, repeat if stain remains. Or pre-soak with detergent granules and water at least 30 minutes and repeat process with a color-safe bleach added to the solution.

### Unknown stains

Follow instruction for oily stains

Quick treatment is important.

\*Note: Some stains fit in more than one category.

**Acne medicine**

Many contain benzoil peroxide, which is insoluble. It leaves a rusty, yellowish stain making the area look bleached. Cannot be removed.

**Adhesive tape, chewing gum, rubber cement**

Apply ice to harden sticky residue. Crack or scrape off excess. Apply pretreatment. Rinse, wash.

**Crayon**

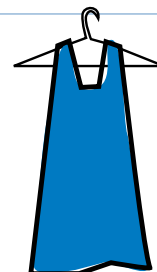
For a few spots on an item, treat same as for oily stains. For a load of clothes, wash in hot water using laundry soap and 1 cup baking soda. If color remains, wash with chlorine (if safe for fabric) or soak in enzyme product or an oxygen bleach (safe for colored fabrics).

**Deodorant, antiperspirants**

Apply liquid detergent. Massage into fabric. Rinse. Wash in warm water. Or pretreat with stain removers, allowing to stand 5-10 minutes. Residues of aluminum or zinc salts may be impossible to remove, making it impossible to restore original color.

**Fingernail polish**

Nail polish may be impossible to remove. Place the stained area face-down on clean paper towels. Sponge nail polish remover on wrong side of fabric. Do not use nail polish remover on fabrics containing acetate or triacetate fabrics. Replace paper towels frequently, repeating applications until stain disappears. Rinse and wash.



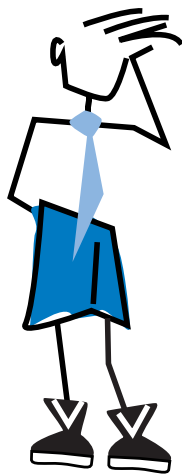
**Mildew**

Fabrics badly damaged by mildew may be impossible to clean. The color seen on mildew stains is really the shadow of pits on the fiber surface where damage has occurred. Wash with chlorine bleach, if safe for fabric. Or use non-chlorine bleach and soak in hot water, then wash.



**Paint**

Once paint is dry, it cannot be removed. While paint is wet (water-based paints) rinse garment in warm water. For oil-based paints, apply solvent recommended on paint can or use turpentine. Rinse. Pretreat with prewash stain remover, bar soap or laundry detergent. Rinse and wash.



**Need more information?**

Check these web sites:

<http://www.sdahq.org>

<http://www.fabriclink.com/>

<http://www.aac.msstate.edu/pubs/pub1636.htm>

