

Methods of Cleaning

Cleaning methods may be remembered and their logic understood most easily when they are considered according to the kinds of surfaces to which they are applied. General principles are few and simple, but important.

The home should be kept clean, not made clean heroically at infrequent intervals. Frequent and systematic cleaning reduces immeasurably the ultimate time and energy required, preserves surfaces, and makes the job more interesting and the home a more pleasant place in which to live.

Frequent brushing of walls, woodwork, curtains, draperies, and upholstered furniture postpones the use of soap and water, and takes much less time than washing. Rugs cleaned daily wear longer. Dust and dirt are abrasive; they cut the fibers on rugs and grind off the finishes on floors.

Dirt should always be removed, not scattered from one place to another. A vacuum cleaner is one of the most helpful tools in accomplishing this.

Insects and rodents may get into the best ordered homes. Part of the job of cleaning is to watch for signs of them and bring them under control. Methods for speedy elimination are available in bulletins issued by this Department and by the State colleges of agriculture.

Paint and varnish

It is easier to clean and care for painted, varnished, and lacquered surfaces if the types of finishes in use today are understood. Each coating applied to wood and plastic is only a few thousandths of an inch thick, and repeated washing soon wears it away.

Wall paints may have a base, or binder, of oil or varnish, emulsified resins, casein, or glue. The oil or varnish types have little or no water in them, and they withstand cleaning with soap and water better than the others. The glossier the paint, the more it will withstand cleaning. The emulsified resin type contains water as a thinner, but the dry film becomes insoluble in water and develops satisfactory resistance to cleansing agents. Casein and glue (calcimine) bound paints are thinned with water and remain more or less readily affected by it. Casein paints may be gently washed, but cannot withstand severe scrubbing. Calcimine may be brushed but cannot be washed. White-wash is essentially a mixture of slaked lime and water, and cannot be washed.

Varnish is a solution of resin or film-forming material in a solvent. Shellac is made from exudate of the lac insect dissolved in alcohol. Lacquer is a nitrocellulose solution in organic solvents, usually modified by the addition of resins.

The procedure for washing painted, varnished, or lacquered surfaces is the same whether they are on furniture, wood trim, walls, or floors. Make a light suds with a mild, neutral soap such as that used for fine fabrics. Wash the surface no harder than is necessary to wash off the dirt. Rinse away every trace of soap with clear water, because soapy water leaves a film to catch and hold dirt. Wipe the surface dry with a clean, soft cloth. Use water as sparingly as though it were an expensive cleaning material. Wash only a small area at a time so water will not be left standing on the surface any longer than is absolutely necessary. Floors should never be flooded with water. The best linoleum can soon be ruined if harsh soap or too much water is used on it, and cheap linoleum can be made to wear a long time if the surface is protected.

When painted walls, wood trim, or wood floors are very dirty, it may be necessary to add a little trisodium phosphate, or other alkaline cleansing agent to the soap and water. These alkaline materials never should be used on furniture or on linoleum or similar floor coverings.

Walls and wood trim should be washed from the bottom up. When water runs down on a soiled surface it leaves streaks that are difficult or impossible

to remove. It will not stain a wall that has already been moistened and cleaned.

It is easier to wash and rinse these surfaces with soft sponges than with cloths, because good sponges are more absorbent. Two pails should be used, one for suds and one for rinse water. The water should be changed frequently, for it is impossible to cleanse anything with dirty water.

After painted walls have been washed, a thin coat of ordinary laundry starch may be applied with a paint brush. The next time the wall needs washing, the job is much easier because the dirt washes off with the starch. Any flat finish will have more gloss after it is washed, for it is impossible not to exert some polishing action.

Varnished, shellacked, and lacquered surfaces, as well as linoleum and cork, are preserved and made easier to care for if they are kept waxed. All waxes should be applied in thin coats. Traffic lanes need rewaxing more frequently than other parts of a room. Kitchen linoleum may need a coat of self-polishing wax every 2 weeks where traffic is heaviest, and once a month over the rest of the floor. On other floors, liquid or paste wax should be applied once in 4 to 6 months depending on the wear they get. Liquid wax is easier to use on furniture; finger marks can be rubbed off with a clean cloth and ordinarily the wax needs to be applied only once a year.

Fabric surfaces

Upholstery, window shades, and rugs all may be cleaned in the home by the same method. First, remove all the dust possible with a vacuum cleaner, brush, or if necessary from upholstery and rugs by beating. Make a thick suds of mild, neutral soap, so thick that the pail seems to be full of suds with almost no water. This will help to keep moisture from soaking through the fabric. For upholstery and window shades, apply the suds to a small area at a time with a sponge or with a piece of turkish toweling or other very absorbent cloth. On window shades a soft bristle brush may be used instead of a sponge. Remove every trace of soap with a sponge squeezed in clear water and let window shades dry before rolling. (Window shades are most easily cleaned on a large table.) In cleaning rugs, a Tampico fiber scrub brush with a long handle may be used. Clean a small area at a time. The rinsing will have to be done on the hands and knees with a sponge, and the nap should be brushed along its original flow with a dry cloth.

It is advisable to have rugs cleaned once a year by a good rug cleaner. Every effort should be made to select a thorough and dependable cleaner. When possible several plants should be visited and the procedures observed. There is a great difference in the cleaning services of different companies.

Leather surfaces

Upholstery-leather cleaning is similar to that for fabric surfaces. Use a thick suds of mild, neutral soap with as little water as possible; wipe off all traces of soap with a damp cloth; then dry and polish the surface with a soft, dry cloth. Never use furniture polish, furniture oils, or varnish on leather. Many of these preparations contain solvents that may soften the finish on upholstery leather and cause it to become sticky. A special commercial leather cleaner and preservative is made of water, wax, and alcohol in a thin solution.

Book bindings may be preserved by working animal or vegetable oils (such as lanolin or castor oil) into them with the hands, especially along the back binding. Mineral oil must never be used on book bindings. A commercial preservative compounded on a formula used in large libraries contains purified lanolin, Japan wax, neat's-foot oil, sodium stearate, and water. It is difficult to obtain the special grades of ingredients necessary for compounding these formulas in the home.