

Selecting and Using Laundry Aids

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This publication is one of a set written to help consumers select and care for today's clothing.

Three of the publications—fibers and fabrics; information found on garment labels; and dyeing and colorfastness—aid consumers in evaluating clothing and household textiles. Those on laundry aids and laundry detergents and soaps help consumers choose effective cleaning products. The publication on professional clothing care services discusses working with a dry cleaner.

Laudry aids include such products as prewash agents, enzyme presoak agents, water softeners, sanitizers, detergent boosters, bleaches, bluing, and fabric softeners. Some detergents include enzymes, oxygen bleaches, and fabric softeners to save time for the consumer.

The brands listed as examples are nationally advertised. You will also find locally available brands, store brands (called private labels), and generic brands. The mention of commercial brands does not constitute endorsement, nor should exclusion of a product be interpreted as criticism.

Prewash agents

Prewash agents remove grease and oily soil, but cannot remove all stains. Use them to treat a small area such as a collar or cuffs without treating the whole garment. They may contain an organic solvent, a surfactant, or both.

Petroleum solvents are the most effective in removing oily soil. They must be sold in aerosol containers because they evaporate readily. Pump containers usually contain surfactants. They are used to remove soil that is a combination of oily soil and particles. To use prewash agents, apply them to the soiled area, then wash your laundry with the hottest water allowable for the fabric. Use the full amount of detergent recommended, and be sure the washer is not overloaded. Some well-known brands include Clorox PreWash, Easy Wash, Grease Relief, Shout (aerosol or pump), and Spray 'n Wash (aerosol or pump).

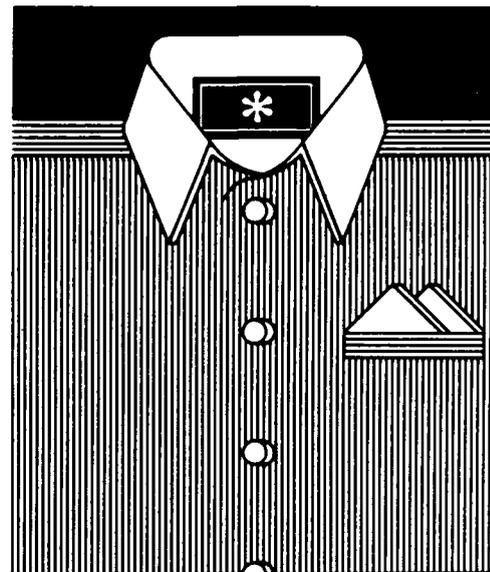
Enzyme presoak agents

Enzyme presoak agents contain enzymes that break down certain stains which can then be more readily removed by the laundry process. They remove protein-based stains such as body soil, perspiration, blood, egg, and baby formula; starch-based stains such as cereal; and some ground-in soil such as grass stains. However, they cannot remove all stains, especially oily or greasy ones.

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* TODAY'S CLOTHING CARE

You can use a paste of enzyme and water on small areas. But since skin is a protein, it is sensitive to protein enzymes, so protect your hands from contact with the enzyme paste by wearing rubber gloves and using a spoon or old toothbrush to apply it.

Because enzymes work slowly, soaking allows the time necessary for action. Enzyme presoaks work best in warm water and should not be used with chlorine bleach because it deactivates the enzymes. Common brands include Amway, Axion, and Biz.

Water softeners

Water softeners improve the cleaning action of detergents in "hard" water by reducing calcium and magnesium minerals. Many detergents contain water softening ingredients referred to as "builders." If your water is medium hard, add more detergent than the amount recommended on the package. If

your water is very hard, use a water softener along with the detergent. The advertising pages of your telephone directory may list laboratories that test water for hardness.

There are two types of water softeners: nonprecipitating and precipitating. Nonprecipitating water softeners leave the water clear; they keep rusty water from staining clothing and are strong enough to dissolve soap curd. You can use them as a presoak to remove discoloration caused by soap curd. Some well-known brands of nonprecipitating softeners include Calgon and White King.

Precipitating softeners form a cloudy precipitate that is visible in the water and may cling to fabrics. A common brand of precipitating softeners is Arm & Hammer Washing Soda.

Laundry sanitizers

Use laundry sanitizers to disinfect clothing and household linens when there is an infection or illness in the family. It's also a good idea to use them for washing clothes in a coin-operated laundromat. Chlorine bleach and pine oils are the most commonly available sanitizers. Use pine oil on garments labeled "Only non-chlorine bleach when needed" or "No bleach." Pine oil brands include Pine Sol, Real Pine, Lysol Pine Action, Spic & Span Pine.

Detergent boosters

Detergent boosters help maintain whiteness or brightness of laundry. Liquid detergent boosters may also aid stain removal. Brands of detergent boosters include Arm & Hammer Washing Soda, Borateem Plus, and 20 Mule Team Borax.

Chlorine bleach

Chlorine bleach is used to disinfect and whiten laundry economically. You can use it on washable, colorfast, natural fiber fabrics such as cotton and linen, but repeated use can weaken cotton and linen and incorrect direct use can cause holes. It is safe for washable, colorfast manufactured fibers except spandex. Do not use it on silk, wool, mohair, or leather. Also, some permanent press fabrics have a finish that holds chlorine and becomes yellowed when chlorine bleach is used. Chlorine bleach decreases the effectiveness of flame-retardant finishes, so be sure to read and follow permanent care labels. Brands of liquid chlorine bleach include Clorox and Purex; one brand of dry bleach is Lysol Laundry Sanitizer.

You can test fabrics for bleach safety by applying one drop of test solution (1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water) to an inconspicuous part of the garment like a seam allowance or inside hem. Let stand for 1 minute, then blot dry and look for color change.

Use chlorine bleach safely and properly. Dilute bleach with at least 1 quart of water before pouring it into the washer to reduce fabric damage. Add diluted chlorine bleach about 5 to 6 minutes after the wash cycle has started so it does not decrease the effectiveness of the detergent. Chlorine bleach deactivates enzymes and decomposes the fluorescent whitening agents. Do not use it if the water contains iron, because the problem of yellowing increases, and do not mix chlorine bleach with ammonia because the mix could cause toxic fumes.

Oxygen bleach

Oxygen bleaches are for light-duty bleaching and for times when you cannot use chlorine bleach, e.g., when the water contains iron. These bleaches are safe to use on all fibers and finishes to help maintain whiteness and brightness of colors. Because oxygen bleaches are weaker than chlorine bleach, they work best in hot water (above 140° F) or with soaking for an hour or more. Common brands of liquid oxygen bleach include Liquid Clorox 2 (hydrogen peroxide), and Vivid. Some brands of dry oxygen bleach are Borateem Bleach, Clorox 2, Purex All Fabric.

Bluing

Bluing whitens clothing by coloring it a faint blue, which counteracts the yellowing of many fabrics. Because bluing acts as a dye, it should be diluted before adding it to the final rinse. Some detergents contain bluing. A common brand is Mrs. Stewart's.

Fabric softeners

Fabric softeners promote smoothness, reduce wrinkling and static cling, and increase flexibility. However, they also reduce absorbency, especially if used excessively, and decrease detergent cleaning power if used in the wash cycle. On towels where absorbency is desired, use a fabric softener no more frequently than every three to four launderings. Don't use fabric softeners with bluing, starches, or packaged water softeners, and don't use them on heavily soiled clothing.

There are several types of rinse-added and dryer-added fabric softeners. By industry agreement, the concentrated rinse-added fabric softeners are blue liquids, and the prediluted ones are pink. To prevent greasy-looking spots, dilute concentrated rinse-added fabric softener before adding it to the water. Automatic washers with a fabric softener dispenser dilute and add the fabric softener into the final rinse. Rinse-added fabric softeners include Downy Regular, Downy Triple Concentrate, Snuggle, Sta Puff, and Sta Puff Concentrate.

Dryer-added softeners are less likely to stain fabrics containing manufactured fibers if you use a low heat setting and a medium-sized, rather than small, load. If stains occur, you can remove them by wetting the area and rubbing the stain with bar soap. Some dryer-added fabric softener brands are Bounce Scented, Bounce Unscented, Cling Free, Free 'n Soft, Snuggle, and Toss 'n Soft.

There is a trend toward adding fabric softeners to laundry detergents. In 1986, 17 percent of heavy-duty powdered detergents and 13 percent of heavy-duty liquid detergents contained fabric softeners. Detergent/fabric softener combinations give less effective cleaning and softening than do separate products, partly because fluorescent whiteners lose effectiveness in detergents when a fabric softener is present. However, the combined product is a time saver for busy people and is easy for children to use when they're learning about laundering.

For more information

Procter & Gamble Educational Services. (1986). *The How To Clean Handbook: Making Easier Work of Laundering, Cleaning and Dishwashing*. Cincinnati, OH.

"Laundry Boosters." (1980). *Consumer Reports*, 45 (2), 76-77.

Learning About Laundry Products. (1978). *Forecast for Home Economics*, 24, (2), 58.

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You also may call Agricultural Communications at Oregon State University, (503) 737-2513, to learn the availability and current price of the publications.

EC 1279, *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source*. \$1.00

EC 1280, *Today's Clothing Care: Dyeing and Colorfastness in Fabrics*. \$1.00

EC 1281, *Today's Clothing Care: Fibers and Fabrics Update*. 75¢

EC 1282, *Today's Clothing Care: Professional Clothing Care Services*. 75¢

EC 1283, *Today's Clothing Care: Laundry Detergents and Soaps*. \$1.00

PNW 284, *International Clothing Care Symbols*. 25¢



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