

Make it last

Easy care tips that can save you money all around the house

Taking the time to do a little preventive maintenance—before things get stained, scratched, frayed, worn out, or broken—is like buying an insurance policy for everything in your house. And it doesn't have to take a lot of effort. We tapped our experts for their best cleaning, storing, and maintenance tips to keep your televisions, computers, furniture, clothes, kitchen gear, and appliances looking and working like new a little longer.

Baking pans. Dry thoroughly after washing to prevent rust. Smearing a little vegetable oil onto the sides and bottom with a paper towel after each use will also work.

Bamboo and wicker furniture. To keep it from drying out and cracking, apply lemon oil or a little furniture cream once a year.

Books. Give them an annual cleaning, wiping them down with a microfiber dust cloth (a magnetic cloth) that attracts and holds dust. Also, don't put books in direct sunlight, and be sure to leave a little bit of space between books and the back of your bookcase so that air can circulate; that helps prevent musty odors and mildew.



CLOTHES WASHER

Don't overload it! That wears down the machine.

Carpeting. Install carpet padding, ideally no more than 7/16-inch thick. Vacuum carpets often, especially in high-traffic areas. Use pads under small rugs, too. Vacuum the pads and rotate rugs periodically.

CDs and DVDs. If you have to clean one (avoid cleaning it unless it's dirty), wipe it with a soft, lint-free cloth from the center to the outer edge as if you were slicing a pie.

Clothes. Wash clothes in cold water; it's less punishing. Use a cold-water

detergent. And hanging clothes to dry is easier on them than using a dryer.

Digital cameras and camcorders. Use the strap to keep from dropping your camera, and stow the camera in a case when it's not in use. Clean dirty lenses gently with a microfiber lens cloth and lens-cleaning fluid.

Dishwashers. If your dishwasher has a filter, check it periodically (look in your manual to find its location) and remove any debris. Also remove debris from the bottom of the machine.

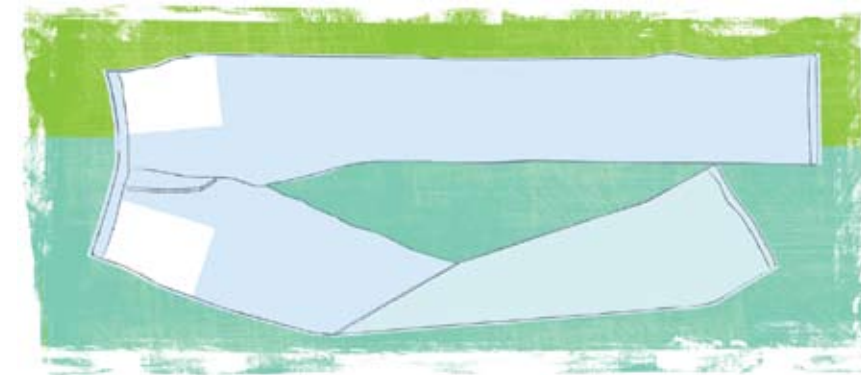
Knives. When they're not in use, store them in a wooden knife block or individual plastic shields to protect their edges. And keep them out of the dishwasher. Machine washing can pit blades, and dishwasher heat might cause wooden handles to crack.

Laptop computers. Use them on a flat surface rather than a soft one such as a bed or carpet, which can block airflow and lead to overheating.

LCD TVs. Clean the screen gently with a soft, slightly damp cloth, ideally a microfiber one. Avoid cleaners and paper towels, which can cause scratches.



DOWN COMFORTERS AND PILLOWS Spot clean whenever possible because goose down loses a bit of its airiness with each washing or dry cleaning. Protect down comforters with a removable cover. Shake and fluff bedding and jackets often to keep the feathers from becoming permanently squashed.



JEANS Wash them inside out to protect the color.

Lingerie. If the label recommends machine washing, use a lingerie bag and the delicate cycle. Also, always wash garments unbuttoned and hang or lay them flat to dry.

Mattresses. Use a protective pad (which should be laundered occasionally). And pull back the sheets and blankets to air out the bed for 20 minutes each morning.

Nonstick pots. Keep them out of the dishwasher. Hand-wash your pots, removing burned-on food with a plastic scrubber.

Ranges. Inspect the burners on gas models regularly and clean the burner ports with a needle. But don't touch the igniter, which can be easily damaged.

Refrigerators and freezers. Clean door gaskets with water and mild detergent periodically. Vacuum the coils, usually under the unit, every few months. They tend to collect dust, which lowers efficiency and raises energy costs.

Slipcovers. Rotate the cushions of furniture with slipcovers so they all get regular wear and maintain a uniform appearance.

Stainless-steel flatware. Use a stainless cleaner to remove scratches and stains and restore shine. Scouring powder or steel wool can cause scratches and reduce stain resistance.

Vacuum cleaners. Small objects such as coins and paper clips can damage the power head and even the motor on some uprights, and string can wind its way around the rotating brush. Unplug the machine and dislodge items ASAP.



TEAKETTLES Remove mineral deposits from the interior by filling the kettle with equal parts white vinegar and water, bringing it to a boil, and allowing it to stand overnight.

WHEN NOT TO DO IT YOURSELF

Sure, professional cleaning might seem extravagant, but it's far less costly than having to replace a badly soiled carpet or piece of furniture when all DIY efforts have failed. Before you hire a pro, get recommendations, check references, and ask for estimates. Also, check with your town's department of consumer affairs and the Better Business Bureau, at www.bbb.org.

■ **ART.** If a print or a painting is of sentimental or commercial value, turn it over to a professional for cleaning.

■ **CARPETS.** If one has a significant amount of ground-in dirt or stains, hire a professional cleaning service. It's also a good idea to have rugs professionally cleaned every one to three years, depending on your household traffic. Rugs with wool pile should generally be wet-cleaned; silk and rayon must be dry-cleaned.

■ **QUILTS.** Antique, silk, or hand-stitched patchwork quilts should always be professionally laundered or dry-cleaned.

■ **UPHOLSTERY.** Don't make a stubborn stain worse by trying to treat it yourself. Call in a pro. Ask for a technician to come to your home to evaluate the job and spot-test the cleaner the company uses in an inconspicuous place on the fabric. A reputable company should be able to tell you what kind of results to expect, outline guarantees and other policies, and provide references.