

Laundry List –

A plethora of washday tips to keep your fashions fresh!

by Bernie Burson, AICI, CDI

Some of us take nearly everything to the dry cleaners, but we really should try to cut back where possible. Perchloroethylene or “perc” (what dry cleaners use to clean clothes) is a major pollutant and probable carcinogen that can linger in freshly-cleaned clothes for up to a week. And, to quote one expert, “The worst are shoulder pads. They absorb perc like mad.” Make sure to remove the dry cleaner’s plastic bags from your clothes and let them air out thoroughly before putting them in the closet. If this inspires you to turn to your washer, here are some guidelines:

- All black or dark washable garments should be washed inside-out to minimize fading.
- Cotton knits should also be washed inside-out to minimize pilling. (I wash—and dry—and iron—pretty much everything inside-out.)
- A cold-water rinse cuts way down on wrinkles.
- The only thing that will get odors out of synthetic fabrics is borax (yes, good old 20 Mule Team Borax, sold in boxes alongside the detergents). A half-cup added to a regular wash not only deodorizes, but is an excellent cleaning booster. For serious odors, pre-soak items for 30 minutes in borax and warm water.
- To keep colored clothes from bleeding on each other, try a Dye Magnet or Color Catcher. The former is a use-30-times terrycloth strip; the latter is a disposable paper cloth—both are found in grocery stores. They attract free-floating dyes in the wash water and keep them from settling back onto the clothes. Supposedly, this means you can wash whites with colors, but I wouldn’t go that far. Lights with darks, maybe, and only if the dark stuff has been washed a few times already.
- Remove clothes from the dryer while they’re still a little damp, then hang to finish drying, smoothing any obvious wrinkles. Cotton knits will need virtually no ironing, and wovens will need just a touch-up.
- Don’t overdo the fabric softener. Half the recommended amount will eliminate static cling and will leave less residue on clothes. Unscented versions are available for those not enchanted with the “April-fresh” smell. And don’t use fabric softener at all on “miracle” fabrics such as Coolmax, Dri-FIT and DuoTech. Fabric softeners—whether used in the washing machine or as dryer sheets—will ruin the effectiveness of hi-tech fabrics.
- Everyone has their own favorite pre-wash spot treatment. Some good ones are: Zout, Amway’s L.O.C., and the Clorox Bleach Pen (for whites). If you use a liquid detergent, try some directly on stains. Inexpensive shampoo is an excellent spot treatment for cuff and collar rings—it’s designed to dissolve body oils.
- Nearly anything labeled “dry flat” or “line dry” can be put in the dryer (on low) for 10-15 minutes first. The garment won’t be hurt and will dry much faster and with less wrinkling.
- The best tape-type lint remover is 3M’s Lint Roller—so much better than the masking-tape rollers. For corduroy and woolens, I like my soft brass-bristle lint brush, which I found at the Vermont Country Store (available online for about eight dollars).

- Home dry-cleaning products (e.g., Dryel) are great for freshening and deodorizing dry-clean-only garments, but leave the spot and stain removal to the professionals.
- Another popular choice for freshening garments (dry-clean or washable) is Febreze, but be warned that it will require **many** squirts to dampen the garment enough to be effective.
- To remove deodorant marks from clothes, simply rub with a crumpled-up nylon stocking.
- And a final bit of helpfulness: For a PDF chart of international apparel care symbols, go to www.textileaffairs.com/acsguide.htm. This will help you decode those fabric care instruction tags.

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