



# Hand Wash Only?

## Get Hands-On With Your Wardrobe

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Even though some fabrics say hand wash only, dry cleaning might be the better option. (photo: Jupiterimages/Polka Dot/Getty Images)

Nothing is more annoying than getting a stain on that favorite silk blouse or cashmere sweater -- except looking at the tag and finding the three words everyone dreads: "Hand wash only." Don't give up on your garment just because of a few words; try some tips and tricks that make hand-washing a breeze.

### Things Aren't Always What They Seem



Delicate fabrics with beading and lace require extra attention. (photo: Getty Images)

**Hand-wash-only fabrics are almost always made of natural fibers, like 100-percent silk or cashmere or wool, and those fabrics don't get soiled easily.**

— Athelia Woolley, co-owner and head designer of Shabby Apple, an online women's boutique

Before pulling that detergent out, consider that it may not be time to wash just yet. Though hand-wash-only clothing tends to be more delicate, it can typically stand up to three to four wears before it's time to clean it,

according to Athelia Woolley, co-owner and head designer of Shabby Apple, an online dress boutique. "Hand-wash-only fabrics are almost always made of natural fibers, like 100-percent silk or cashmere or wool, and those fabrics don't get soiled easily," she says.

Also, depending on the type of fabric, hand-washing may not be your only option. Many clothes that carry a hand-wash-only tag may actually be machine-washable, according to experts including Woolley and Krystal Savanella, fashion designer and owner of Krystal Savanella Designs House of Couture, a high-end clothing label based in Ventura, California. They say the labeling typically serves to protect the clothing manufacturer from liability in case something goes wrong in the washing machine.

"The majority of the time a manufacturer suggests 'hand wash only' due to beading or another type of embellishment or a fiber or fiber blend that is delicate and might shrink or change properties, such as a fuzzy sweater," explains Savanella.

So, when is the right time to hand wash your garments? Take it on a case-by-case basis. When it comes to sweaters, antique clothing or clothing with embellished features, like jewelry, sequins or other beading, stick to hand-washing only.

For natural fibers like silk, wool or cashmere, the rules can vary, depending on with whom you talk. Some say they can handle the machine, in a cold wash on the gentle cycle, but Savanella advises leaving those fabrics to the professionals. "I have the rule never to wash silk or wool [in water]," she says, "even if it says hand-washing is OK. Dry clean only."

## The Greener Side

Looking for a green alternative to your laundry detergent? Cleaning expert and author Leslie Reichert dishes out plenty of suggestions in her book, "The Joy of Green Cleaning." Try this old-fashioned laundry soap recipe, included in her book:

Mix 2 cups of soap flakes with 1 cup each of baking soda, borax and washing soda (sold in the laundry aisle). This mix makes at least 5 cups of laundry soap. For a machine wash, use 1 to 2 tablespoons of the mix.

For hand-washing very delicate fabrics, use 1 teaspoon of soap flakes only.

## Mistakes to Avoid

Sometimes hand-washing can be a frustrating process, especially when you don't get the results you want. Leslie Reichert, cleaning expert and author of "The Joy of Green Cleaning," shares some common mistakes to avoid.

First, never use hot water; go with water at cool, cold or lukewarm temperatures. Make sure the sink is clean, or dedicate a special tub to hand-washing. And always add the soap to the water before placing the clothing in, not afterward.

If there's a stain on your piece, pretreat it the old-fashioned way before you hand wash it. "Back in the day, they used an old-fashioned soap and a small brush," Reichert explains. "Depending on the fabric, rub the soap into the spot and, if the fabric can take it, brush it in on both sides of the spot."

If the piece is really dirty, let it soak overnight in cold water before hand-washing it. Once it's time to wash, fill up the sink about three-fourths full and follow the directions that came with the detergent. Or alter the instructions to suit your needs. "I use like three-fourths of the amount that the instructions recommend," says Woolley.

Reichert advises that when washing more than one item, never mix colors. Just as with machine-washing, the colors can bleed into each other. Rinse the garment as many times as it takes to remove all the soap, but never wring a piece of clothing. Gently squeeze or pat it to remove suds. Place especially delicate items on a screen and then soak the screen in the water to rinse.

## Finishing Touches

If commercially popular detergents are too harsh on your garment, try a very gentle dish soap or laundry soap, Reichert suggests. "Originally, soap was made with animal fat, but now there's olive oil- and vegetable-based soaps out there," she says. "I use soap flakes." This type of soap can be hard to find, but green cleaning stores and websites carry it.

Drying your hand-washed clothing properly can be just as crucial as the cleaning process. Reichert says always lay the clothing flat to dry, either on a clean white towel or a raised mesh or netted drying rack that allows the garment to lay flat. Never hang sweaters, but instead use what Reichart calls a "blocking" technique in which you lay the sweater on a clean towel and roll it up to get rid of excess water, then lay it flat to dry. This keeps the sweater from becoming misshapen.

Once the item is mostly dry, you can even toss it in the dryer, but set it to tumble dry only, Salvarella says. Again, do not use this technique with antique or embellished clothing or knitwear if you want to maintain its original shape and style.

[http://www.ehow.com/feature\\_12163110\\_hand-wash-only.html](http://www.ehow.com/feature_12163110_hand-wash-only.html)