A Clean Home

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University
Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

For current policies and practices, contact SDSU Extension
Website: extension.sdstate.edu
Phone: 605-688-4792
Email: sdsu.extension@sdstate.edu

SDSU Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer in accordance with the nondiscrimination policies of South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents and the United States Department of Agriculture.
How to Clean Paint, Wallpaper, Wood, Plastics

Housecleaning is always a big job.

Dirt enters the house in many ways...on people's shoes, clothing or hands; on animal's feet and fur; on toys; and on the air.

There are two basic kinds of "soil," as we'll term this dirt, for us to deal with:

1. WATER SOLUBLE SOILS... those which water will dissolve, such as fruit juice, soda pop (carbonated beverages), and sugar-containing foods; and

2. WATER INSOLUBLE SOILS... those which water will not dissolve, such as oily deposits (residue) from cooking or from heating stoves, a mixture of body oil and soil, and other grease-bearing stains.

KNOW YOUR DIRT

To clean a surface we must know of what the surface is made, with what kind of soil we are dealing, what cleaning product will help us do the best job and what tools or equipment will help us do the best job and what tools or equipment will help us do the easiest job. It is extremely important to follow the directions for taking care of the surface, performing the task, using the right cleaning product and using the right tools to avoid an accident by using the wrong product or method on a surface.

BUT FIRST: REPAIRS

Repairs come first. The original surface may be plaster or plasterboard, painted, paneled (wood or plastic), or wallpapered. It is possible to have plastic, metal or wood "woodwork" in your home. In addition to some suggestions for making repairs given here you can get further information from commercial packages of repairing materials or from business firms that deal in the particular material with which you are working.

Plaster

Plaster is repaired with commercial patching plaster or you can mix regular plaster. Mix the material for patching in a completely clean vessel according to the directions given for the product. The plaster should be pressed into the crack or hole and struck off flush with the main surface. A deep crack or hole must be large enough to get the new plaster forced in far enough to form a good bond with the old plaster. It's best to scrape the inside of the break so you have an opening of at least a quarter of an inch. Brush loose plaster and soil away from the opening. Spray the opening with a light mist of water as new plaster will adhere to a moist surface better than it will to a dry surface. When the opening is moistened, force the new plaster into the opening and strike off the excess so the patched area is flush with the original surface. Allow the patch to dry at least 24 hours before doing any further work on the surface.

Plasterboard

Plasterboard may be repaired by using a piece of similar material. You can cut the damaged section out of the original piece in a square or rectangular shape. The patch is cut the same shape and size from extra material. Do not cut the piece with right angle edge cuts, but instead bevel the edges:

USE THIS


NOT THIS


The patch will usually fit better if the edges are beveled. The patch can be tacked in place with small nails or glued with a glue suitable for the material on which you are working. If the damaged area is
excessively large, you may need to replace an entire section of the plasterboard.

**Paint**

Paint can be repaired by using the same original color paint, however, it is likely the newly painted area will look a different color. Thus, you may prefer to paint the entire wall if the spot is in a conspicuous location. Before repainting any surface it must be cleaned and allowed to dry for at least 24 hours.

**Paneling**

Paneling can be repaired using the same method as described for repairing plasterboard.

**Wallpaper**

Wallpaper can be repaired by carefully removing the section around the damaged area and inserting a new section of the same paper. It is best to match the design so you have uninterrupted pattern. This is not as important in inconspicuous areas as it is in locations which are more easily seen. It’s best to clean the area of wallpaper around the patch area before making the repair.

**NOW, FOR THE CLEANING**

Once your repairs are made you are ready to clean the area. Whatever surface you are working on must be carefully handled to prevent damage. Knowledge and understanding of methods and materials will help you and make your job easier.

Here are some suggested steps to follow to help you do the best job:

- Dust the wall surfaces. Use a vacuum cleaner, clean dust mop, soft brush or a cloth covered broom. Remove cobwebs by lifting them up off the wall . . . cobwebs tend to be greasy and can cause a dirty, hard-to-remove streak if brushed downward. Begin dusting at the top of the room on the ceiling and work down because loose soil falls and redeposits on lower surfaces.
- Arrange your equipment and cleaning supplies within easy reach of your work area. This helps you make better use of your time and energy by eliminating extra stooping, bending and walking.
- Wash small sections of the wall at a time starting at the bottom and working to the top. (Working from bottom to top prevents streaking which is difficult to remove.) Wash, rinse and dry one area before going on to the next.
- When washing woodwork next to a non-washable surface hold a cardboard or some other protective covering over the wall at the woodwork edge. This way you won’t waterspot the wall finish.
- Avoid using excessive amounts of water on your cleaning cloth. Trickles of water down the wall or down your arm are messy and unpleasant.

- Keep your cleaning cloths clean. If necessary wash the cloth in the sink to clean it during your cleaning job. Dirty cloths do not clean.
- Test whatever cleaner you plan to use in a small inconspicuous location. Be sure before starting that your cleaning efforts aren’t going to create more problems than you had to begin with.
- Never allow your housecleaning jobs to completely exhaust you. Plan to do part today and part tomorrow so you can perform the essential everyday jobs in addition to your housecleaning.

**Painted Surfaces**

Some paints are classed “washable,” others are not. However, any paint can be damaged by rubbing, strong cleaning agents or gritty powders (abrasives). Thus we see that mild cleaners and gentle action are the bywords for cleaning painted surfaces.

Gloss or enamel will take stronger and more frequent washing than other paints. Rubber base or latex paints will wash fairly well. It is usually suggested that latex paint not be washed until it has been on the walls for at least 30 days. Non-washable paint cleans most satisfactorily with a dough-type cleaner.

In cleaning painted surfaces follow these steps:

- Prepare your cleaning solution (see recipes below).
- Use two containers . . . one for the cleaning solution and one for the rinse water.
- Start at the bottom and work up to the top.
- Use as little water as possible on your cloth, but change the water often because you can’t clean with dirty water.
- Rub gently.
RECIPES FOR CLEANING PAINT

For Washable Paints

SOAP JELLY

Dissolve in a wide mouthed container: 1 cup soap flakes in 4 cups boiling water. Allow the solution to cool. This will thicken to a jelly-like texture. When cool, dip a clean cloth in to the jelly and gently work the mixture in to the soiled surface. Use a damp cloth to wipe away the jelly and soil. Allow the surface to dry.

NOTE: If the surface tends to be greasy, mix one tablespoon of household ammonia into the solution before allowing it to cool.

For Non-washable Paints

DOUGH-TYPE CLEANER

Combine: 2 cups flour
4 teaspoons baking soda
Mix together: 1 1/4 cups water
2 1/2 tablespoons household ammonia

Combine these in the top of a double boiler and beat until smooth. (If you don't have a double boiler note instructions below.) The bottom pan of the double boiler should have about two cups of boiling water in it. Cover the top pan and place it in the bottom pan of the double boiler. Place the double boiler on the range over low heat and allow the mixture to cook about 1 1/2 hours. Remove from the heat and leave covered until the mixture is cool enough to handle.

Uncover and knead the flour mixture until it's soft and smooth. Store in a tightly covered container until you are ready to use it. At the most, the above recipe would yield 1 1/4 cups of cleaner. How far this amount will go depends on how dirty the surface is.

NOTE: If you don't have a double boiler find two pans you can fit together so you can put water in the bottom pan and the flour mixture in the top. The flour mixture must be cooked by steam . . . direct heat on the pan of flour mixture will cook the flour too rapidly at too high a temperature.

To use the dough-type cleaner, take a small amount and begin cleaning the wall from the top down. Knead the soiled surface of the dough in as you are cleaning. When it no longer cleans start with a fresh piece of dough. Overlap your strokes to prevent streaking. Brush any crumbs away with a vacuum cleaner or soft cloth. Remember to rub gently.

Wallpaper Surfaces

Wallpaper may be washable or non-washable. Some wallpapers are paper, some are fabric and some are vinyl (plastic) coated. You should use the dough-type cleaner for wallpaper unless it is completely washable. Use the same recipe as given for cleaning nonwashable paints.

If the wallpaper is washable use cool sudsy water as your cleaner. If you have hard water, add a water softener to the solution (2 teaspoons of water softener per 1 gallon of water) so your suds don't disappear so quickly. Be sure to use cool water rather than warm water. Warm water tends to soften and loosen the paper. Avoid rubbing and excessive moisture.

Remember to test the cleaner in an inconspicuous area before beginning to clean.

Wood Paneled Surfaces

Dust wood paneling weekly. When needed, wash with a soft, damp cloth using a solution of mild soap and warm water. Rinse this with clear water and wipe dry. Use as little moisture as possible on the wood and work in small areas at a time. Too much water will damage the wood. Be sure to wipe the surface dry.

If wood is badly soiled a good cleaner is made from the following:

Mix together in a pan or bowl:
1 quart of boiling water
1 tablespoon of gum turpentine
3 tablespoons boiled linseed oil

(Purchase "boiled linseed oil," don't try to boil your own.)

Remove old wax from the wood surface with a clean cloth dampened with turpentine, or by washing well with soap and water. Keep the above mixture warm while you are using it by placing the container in a pan of hot water. Stir well just before using so the ingredients are well mixed. Dip a dampened cloth in the mixture, wring it out well and wash the surface with the cloth. Immediately wipe the surface dry with a clean, dry cloth. Repeat this process until the job is completed.
After the paneling has dried about one hour, apply wax to the wood to protect it. A thin coat of paste wax will provide a very durable finish, however, paste wax requires a great deal of buffing. You may prefer to use a liquid polishing wax and not have to do quite so much buffing. (CAUTION: Use self-polishing wax on floors, NOT on other surfaces.)

The best wax finish will be a thin coat of wax with thorough buffing. An unbuffered wax surface tends to attract dust like a magnet.

Several special commercial products are available designed to clean and care for wood paneling so you might make a price-comparison of the methods suggested above. Self-cleaning waxes can be used, but they do not supply the same protection to the paneling as paste or liquid polishing waxes.

**Simulated Wood Paneling**

Simulated wood paneling . . . the kind that looks like wood but is paper instead . . . should be cleaned with the same method as used for non-washable paints.

**Vinyl (Plastic) Coated Paneling or Formica**

This kind of paneling or finish might look like wood, marble, or any number of other attractive finishes. It must be remembered, however, that plastics scratch rather easily. NEVER dust a plastic finish with a dry dust cloth. The smallest particle of dust will scratch. Always use a dampened cloth. Wash the finish with soap and water, rinse and dry with a soft cloth. Never use abrasive cleaners on plastic surfaces. Scratches dull a plastic finish and cause it to lose its original beauty.

It is usually unnecessary to wax plastic finishes. Cleaning solvents will damage plastic surfaces, so be careful not to use these. A water base wax (self-polishing wax) should be used if you decide to wax a plastic surface.

Static electricity sometimes causes plastic to collect dust. You can help reduce the static electricity by rinsing the plastic finish with a solution of fabric softener and water. Also, there are anti-static dusting cloths on the market for use on plastic surfaces.

Plastic is very durable but it can be damaged. It is likely to blister if it comes in contact with a hot pan or an iron. It can be cut as easily as it can be scratched. Once damaged a plastic finish is nearly impossible to repair. Replacement of the entire piece is usually necessary. Treat plastic with respect, take good care of it and it will serve you well for a long time.

Yes, housecleaning is a big job. It can be a smaller, easier job if you:

- use the proper cleaner and method for the surface.
- clean up spots as they occur.
- keep things in order every day rather than leaving everything and trying to do an entire year’s work in one day.
- treat everything in your home with TLC (“tender loving care”).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Duane Acker, Director of Extension Service, South Dakota State University, Brookings. The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service offers educational programs and materials to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex or national origin, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.