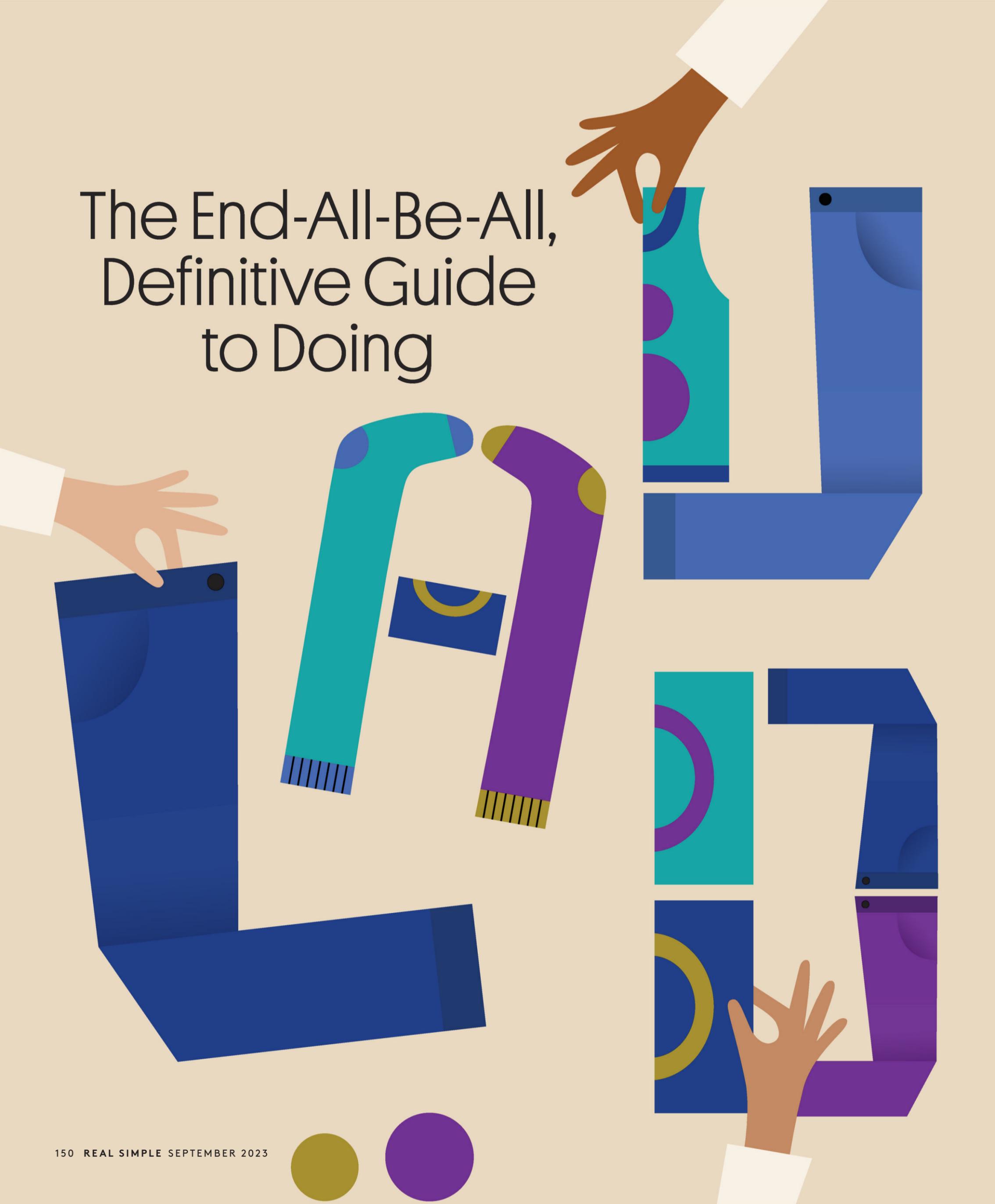


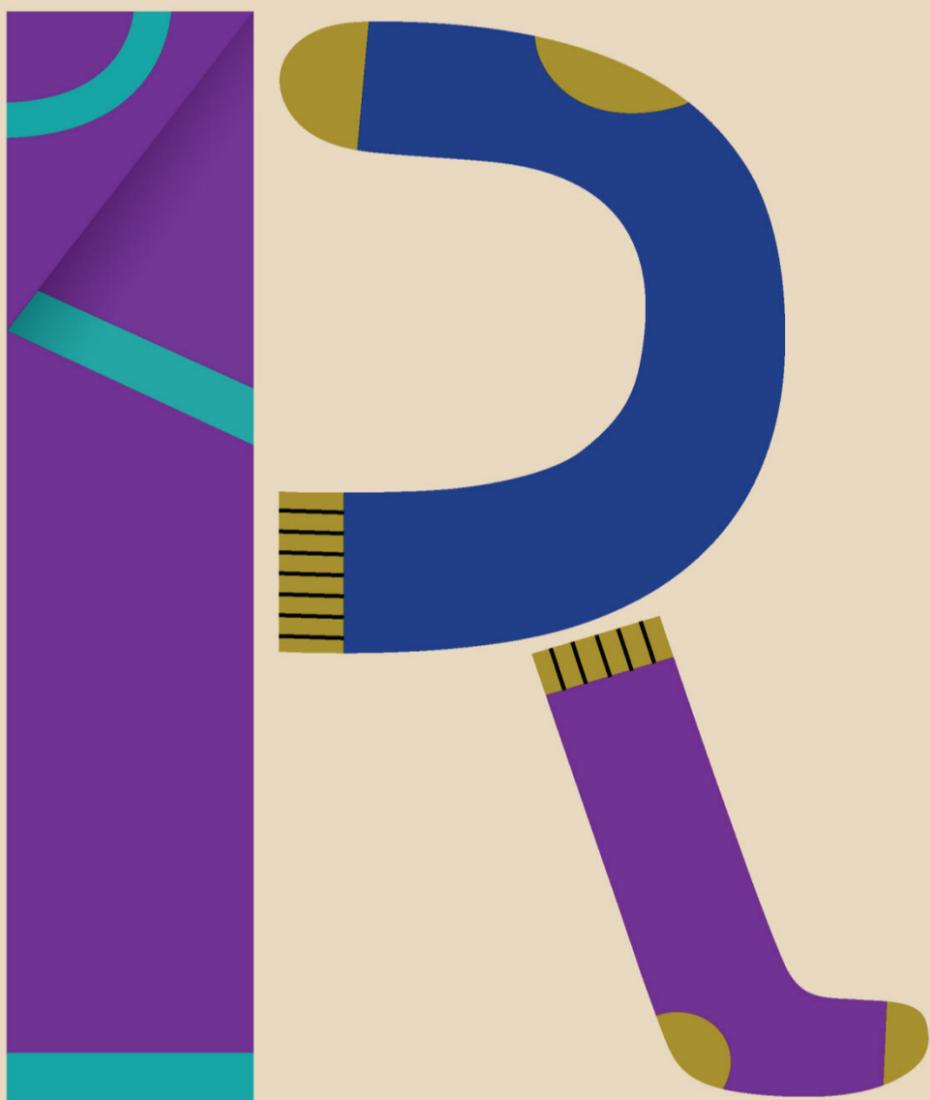
The End-All-Be-All, Definitive Guide to Doing





A truism of modern housekeeping:
The laundry is never done.
And to pile on (pun intended),
certain items might require
pretreatment, special care, and
maybe even a mysterious washer
setting. If you feel like you're
perpetually tackling the job as if
your clothes were on the line (they
kinda are), this comprehensive
manual will help you take a load off.

BY LESLIE CORONA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ASIA PIETRZYK



**AT THE
HAMPER**



Sort It All Out

At the very least, separate whites, lights, and darks. Even if dyes don't bleed dramatically, mixing colors can turn lighter clothes a muddier shade, says Melissa Maker, founder of the Toronto-based cleaning company Make My Space. If you want to go the extra mile, also avoid combining fabric types, which can cause pilling. A bit more on what belongs with what:

- Ideally, all things denim get their own load.
- Activewear goes with other lightweight items because it dries quickly.
- Bedding and towels can get washed together. Use wool dryer balls (see page 155) and untangle as needed before drying.
- Sort striped clothes according to the lighter shade. So a black-and-white shirt belongs with whites.
- Gray is in a bit of a gray zone: It could go with lights if it's not a deep shade, but it's usually pretty forgiving if it makes its way into the dark pile by accident.

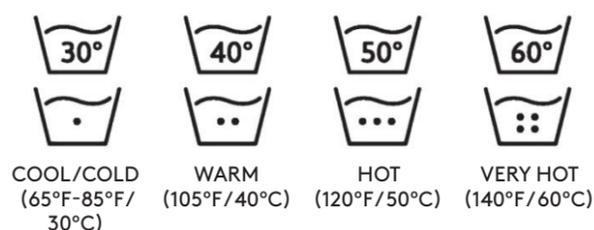
UNDERSTAND TAG TALK

Always look at care labels! Sometimes they're written out in words, but icons are getting increasingly common among global brands, says Frances Kozen, senior lecturer in fiber science at Cornell University. Here's some help translating those hieroglyphic figures (symbols can vary slightly).

WASH



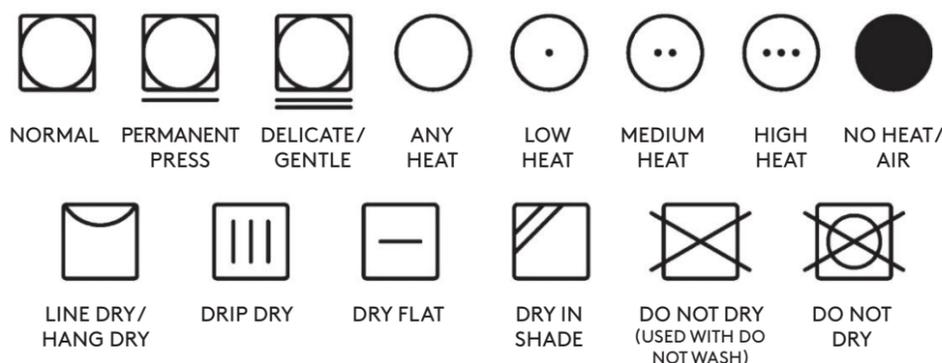
WATER TEMPERATURES (MAXIMUM)



BLEACH



DRY



MISCELLANEOUS



Treat Those Stains

Address stains ASAP, and don't machine dry an item until they're gone—heat can set them for good! Zach Pozniak, vice president of Jeeves of Belgravia, a dry-cleaning service in New York City, shares fixes for three common ones.

MAKEUP

Forget the hacks, Pozniak says. A quality stain remover (see page 155) and a little time—at least overnight—are what you need here. "Keep a stain remover by the hamper so you can hit stains before tossing items in," he says. This gives the solution a chance to really sink in until laundry day. In fact, do this for most stains!

OIL SPOTS

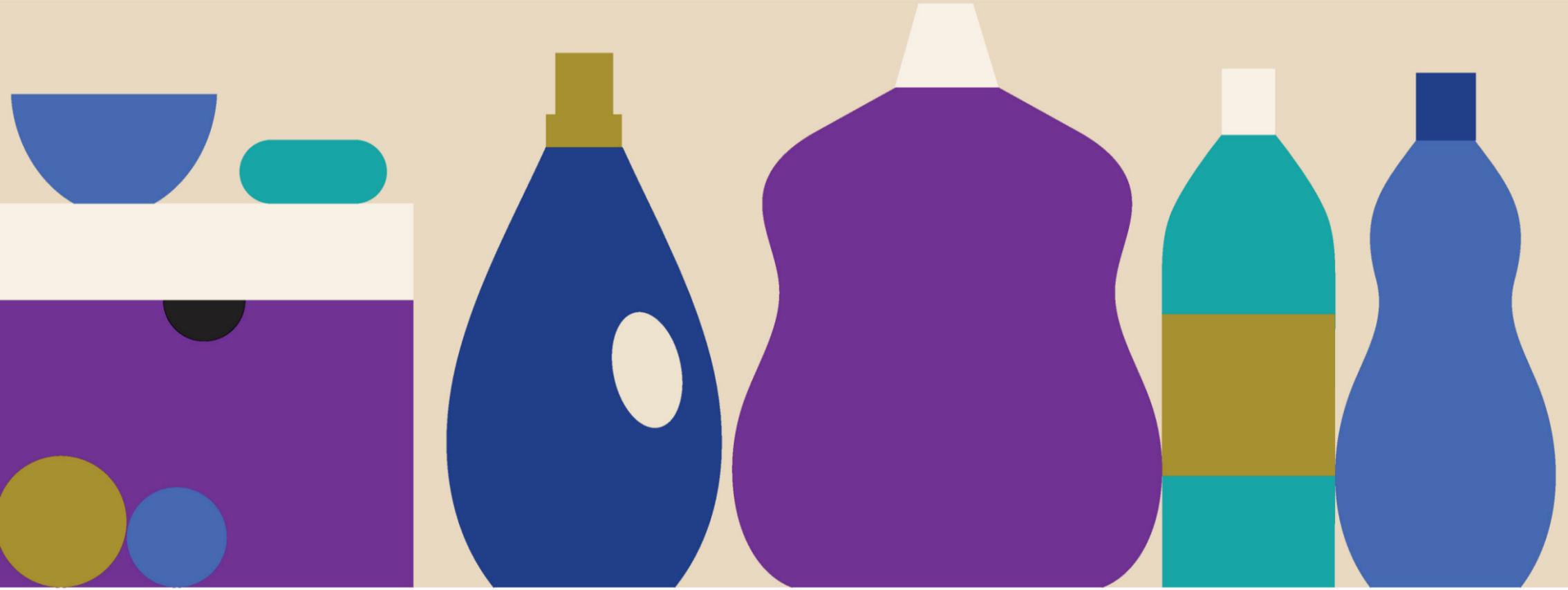
Rub a drop of dish soap into the spot, then let it sit. Check the garment under different lighting once it's out of the washing machine. If the stain remains, add more dish soap and rewash.

UNDERARM STAINS

Pozniak has two solutions: Spray the area with hydrogen peroxide and let it air-dry before washing, or soak the top overnight in hot water and powdered oxygen bleach (see page 155).

Freshen Up Stinky Activewear

Fill a bucket with cool water, plus a cup each of white vinegar and baking soda. Soak clothes overnight. For odor prevention, regularly add vinegar or another acidic product (like the clean-smelling Downy Rinse & Refresh, \$7 for 25.5 oz.; target.com) to the fabric softener slot in your machine. If you tend to get extra fragrant when you work out—no judgments!—spray the underarms and groin with stain remover before tossing aired-out activewear into the hamper.

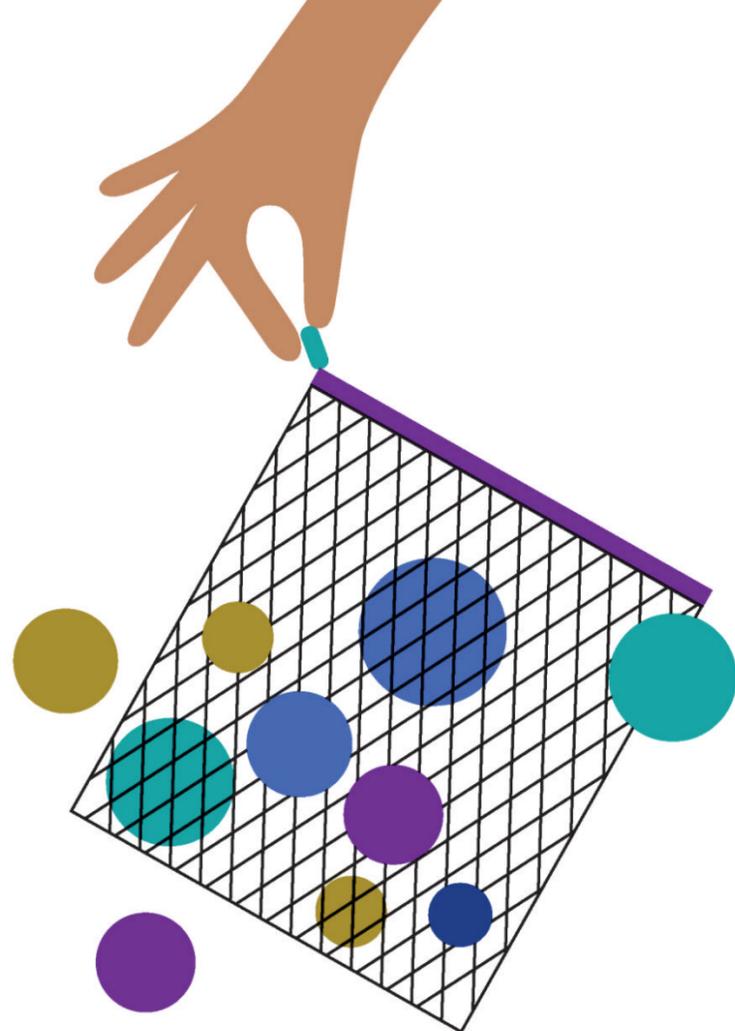


ON YOUR



SUPPLY SHELVES





Pick Your Suds & Stock Up on the Right Staples

Detergent

What's best for you? We have some info that might sway you one way.

Liquid detergents give dosage instructions on the bottle, but in most cases, you don't need more than two tablespoons. Too much can lead to buildup on your clothes and excess suds in the machine.

Pods are nice for families with consistently large loads. If your pods aren't dissolving, your loads are likely too full and the water isn't reaching the pod. (Gotta find that sweet spot!) Also, toss the pod into the drum before your clothes, because sometimes it can get caught in the door. By the way, see those swirly colors? Procter & Gamble confirms they're the detergent, stain remover, and whitening agents in Tide Pods.

Powders are one of the more eco-friendly options, as they're usually packaged in recyclable cardboard.

That said, powder doesn't always fully dissolve, so you *may* need to kick up the water temp a smidgen.

Dissolving sheets, the newest category, check off lots of eco-friendly boxes. And you can tear them in half for smaller loads.

Powdered Oxygen Bleach

This is your best friend for brightening fabrics, eliminating odors, and removing stains. With powdered hydrogen peroxide as its active ingredient, it's gentler on clothes than chlorine bleach (see "Reconsider These Supplies," right) and can be used on whites *and* colors. Stir the powder into a bucket of warm water (see package for amounts), then let your garments soak for at least four hours and up to overnight. If you want to add the powder to a cycle instead, dial up the water temperature to warm. For anyone who's already used chlorine bleach on whites: Sorry, but the yellowing damage is done.

Stain Remover

You can use a liquid detergent to pretreat stains, but stain removers come in packaging designed for easy application, like a spray or tube. (We like Shout and Puracy.) Apply it as soon as you can, and give it time to do its thing. As Pozniak says, "The longer you let it sit on a stain, the better it's going to work. If you spray it on a garment right before you throw it into the washer, it won't do much."

Wool Dryer Balls

These tools bounce around between items and separate them, boosting aeration and leading to faster drying. You know how sometimes you take sheets out of the dryer and they're all in a damp knot? Wool dryer balls help prevent that, says Mary Marlowe Leverette, a fabric care expert in Columbia, South Carolina. Keep four to six in the dryer at all times.

Mesh Bags

Get a bunch of these, stat! They're great for delicates, socks, hats, even headbands and hair ties. Bonus points if you buy the kind designed to filter microplastics (\$35 each; guppyfriend.us)—as in, the bits of plastic that shed from synthetic garments (yoga pants, fleece pull-overs) when they're washed and can end up in waterways.

Extra Stuff

Dish soap is a classic grease-stain remover, and **shampoo** is magic for spot-treating wool (it's technically hair, after all!). Both of these should be applied by the drop and rubbed in. Let sit until the garment is ready to wash. Patric Richardson, author of *Laundry Love*, spritzes **vodka** on lightly worn clothes to deodorize between washes.

Reconsider These Supplies

Your clothes will thank you, Richardson says.

FABRIC SOFTENER

Too much detergent can stiffen clothes, so if you cut back, you won't need fabric softener at all. Can't give it up? Just don't use it on activewear or towels—it can leave a coating that traps stink and inhibits absorption.

DRYER SHEETS

They're great at nixing static electricity, but they can leave a waxy residue. Instead, lower your dryer's heat, and pull out clothes when they're still a tiny bit damp. The moisture helps prevent clinging as stuff dries.

SCENT BOOSTERS

With some scented balls, the fragrance can linger on your clothes for months. They're a nice option for those who want a super-charged fresh aroma, but for many folks, they're unnecessary and overpowering.

CHLORINE BLEACH

Cotton is not naturally a dazzling white. Your pearly tees are dyed that shade, and bleach strips the dye. Plus, most of us dilute it incorrectly, and too much can degrade fabric over time. Bleach can be useful for disinfecting laundry after an illness like norovirus, as long as you use it within a year of opening.

AT THE WASHING MACHINE



LEARN THE SETTINGS

Experts at three appliance manufacturers—GE, LG, and Whirlpool—explained some of the most confusing washer cycles.

DELICATE

For your fancy undies! And lacy camis and tights! This option (sometimes called “hand wash”) typically uses cold water with slow spin speeds and extended soaking periods—making it gentler on fabrics. Some items with “hand wash” on the care label can be cleaned on delicate, but garments with sequins or other embellishments could be quick to snag in these conditions. When in doubt, use a mesh bag.

DRAIN AND SPIN

Not to be confused with “rinse and spin,” which uses cold water, this cycle doesn’t use *any* water. It’s good if you’ve handwashed something, or if clothes are still sopping wet at the end of a cycle.

ECO

The eco-friendly button calls up cold water. This cycle is usually a little longer—70 minutes versus the standard 50—but it can still help reduce energy use by at least 35 percent, because the machine doesn’t have to do any of that water heating.

PERMANENT PRESS

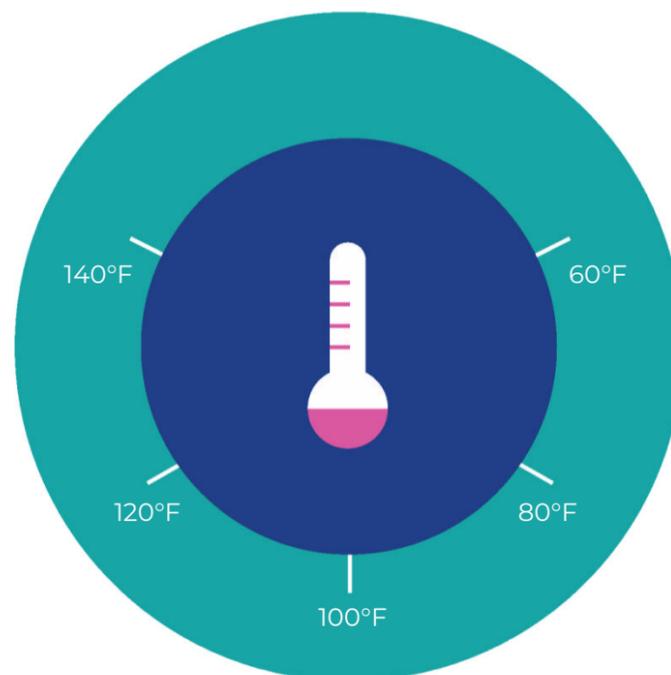
Some machines now call this the “casual” cycle, which is not much clearer! It helps reduce creasing in certain fabrics, like ones made of synthetic or blended materials (think polyester-cotton dress shirts and pants).

QUICK (OR EXPRESS)

This uses warm water and a high spin speed, just like normal loads, but runs for less time. It’s best for washing only a few items, as full loads may not get entirely cleaned. Use about half the detergent you typically would—there’s usually one less rinse cycle, and you don’t want any lingering suds.

SPIN SPEEDS

You can reduce drying time by upping the spin speed. Just keep in mind: Higher speeds will extract more water, but all the twisting can lead to more wrinkles and be rougher on fabrics.



Set the Temperature

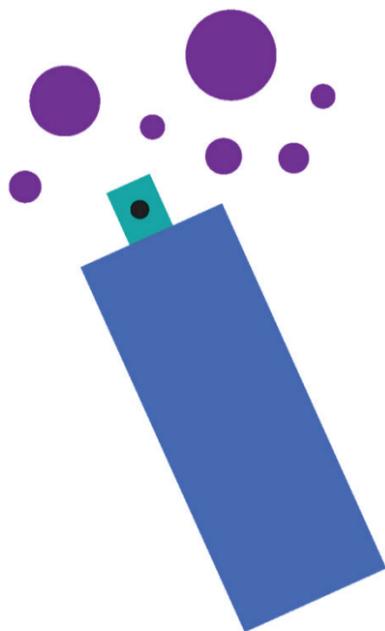
Go for cold most of the time. This not only saves energy, it also helps prevent color fading, which hot water can accelerate. It’s OK to use warm sometimes, like when you’re adding oxygen bleach, because heat boosts its efficacy. The hot and (extra-hot) sanitizing cycles are generally unnecessary. If you’re nervous about cooties, Jennifer Ahoni, a scientist at Procter & Gamble, says don’t fret! “Research has shown that in cold water, the laundry process, along with good detergent, will usually kill most everyday germs—even the common cold.” Only consider bumping up to the sanitizing cycle if someone in your home has a serious stomach bug.

Skip the Strip

The trendy process of laundry stripping—which entails soaking garments in a tub of superhot water, borax, washing soda, and detergent for hours—is generally bad for clothes, as it can lead to fabric degradation and fading. That “dirty” water you see in TikTok demos is mostly just dye. Stripping once after buying used textiles could be beneficial, and you can do it occasionally for items that can’t go into the wash. Otherwise, give this fad a pass!

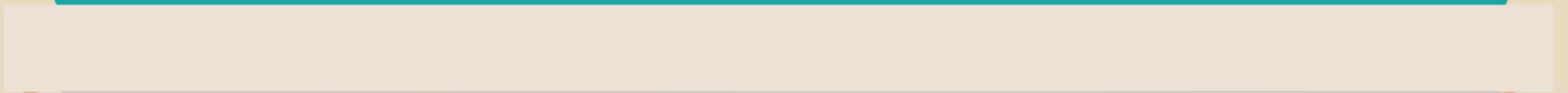
Banish Odors & Fix That Funky Gasket

As silly as it sounds, you have to wash your washer! Run an empty cycle once a month with an Affresh tablet (\$9.50 for 6; amazon.com). Afterward, Maker says, clean the door’s gasket with an antimold formula, like Concrobium Mold Control Spray (\$14 for 32 oz.; homedepot.com). Between loads, leave the door and detergent dispenser open to prevent mold. A magnetic door prop (\$17; impresaproducts.com) can help. FYI, fabric softeners can coat your machine’s drum and lead to mildew!



AT THE

DRYER



LEARN THE SETTINGS

Aaand now it's time to talk about what all those dryer buttons mean!

AIR FLUFF

A no-heat choice! The dryer will draw in room-temperature air as the drum tosses your clothes. It's best for fluffing up comforters, pillow inserts, and down jackets.

DELICATES

Turn to this low-heat option for thin or lacy fabrics, loosely woven pieces, items with embellishments, and anything dryer-safe and labeled, you guessed it, delicate. Also use it for activewear if you can't hang-dry those items. (High temps can degrade stretchy or elastic fabric.)

PERMANENT PRESS

You may remember this one from your washing machine. Select this setting and, at the end of the cycle, it'll cool down blended fabrics while they're still wrinkle-free and prevent new crinkles from happening.

STEAM

This cycle uses a bit of water and heat to refresh clothes, gently releasing wrinkles and removing odors. If you have a crumpled blouse or lightly worn pants that aren't exactly dirty, this is your cycle.



Find Those Missing Socks

One of life's greatest mysteries: Where do all the socks go? There's a chance your machine is gobbling them up. They can get stuck in the filter on the bottom of some front loaders or, more rarely, in the dryer exhaust vent, which can be a fire hazard! (Check the vent periodically.) They might also fall while you're transferring loads and end up between, behind, or beneath machines. After you pull clothes out of the wash, always rotate the drum manually to loosen anything clinging, and feel around the gasket. Look around the area to make sure you got everything. And while you're folding, shake out items in case socks are caught in a leg or sleeve. To help prevent disappearances, put all the socks in a large mesh bag; avoid packing them too tightly or they won't get a thorough clean. Maker suggests pinning one onto the hamper so your fam can add their socks as they undress.

Get Good at Hang-Drying

The dryer is one of the biggest energy suckers in a home! Hanging is an easy way to be greener, says Melissa Breyer, editorial director of our sister brand Treehugger, a sustainability website. It can also help save your clothes from shrinkage and abrasion. Not a fan of airing your laundry for all the neighbors to see? You can do it inside—just set up clothes near the boiler when it's cold (not too close!). Depending on your climate, consider using a dehumidifier too.

Know When (& How) to Fold 'Em

Folding clothes immediately after the dryer buzzes will drastically reduce wrinkles. When unloading, pull out anything that needs to get hung, and don't bother folding undies. (Will the world know they're wrinkled? Nope.) Pairing socks will go faster if they're grouped in mesh bags (see "Find Those Missing Socks," left). Finally, roll towels instead of folding them. You'll maximize storage space and feel like you're at a spa when you grab one.



Try These Dryer Hacks

Speed up, smooth out, and scent loads.

Add a dry towel to shorten any cycle.

Throw in a damp towel or a few ice cubes (or spray garments with water) to help release wrinkles.

Apply a few drops of your favorite essential oil to wool dryer balls to impart a light, natural fragrance to your clothing.