How to Clean a Rug at Home

Fresh, soft and good-looking — without ruining the fibres.

Most rugs do not need professional cleaning. With regular care, quick action on spills, and one proper deep clean every few months, you can keep a rug fresh for years.

Know Your Rug First

• **Wool rugs:** durable but sensitive to harsh chemicals and very hot water. Use cool or lukewarm water only, and mild detergent.

• **Cotton rugs:** usually the easiest to clean; many smaller ones can be machine-washed on a gentle cycle.

• **Jute, sisal and other plant-fibre rugs:** these must never be soaked. Water can stain, warp and weaken natural fibres, and they take a very long time to dry.

• **Silk and antique rugs:** do not deep-clean these at home. Vacuum gently and spot-clean only, and leave deep cleaning to a professional.

• **Synthetic rugs (nylon, polyester, polypropylene):** the most forgiving, and usually safe for a gentle wash.

■■ SAFETY — Test any cleaner on a small hidden corner first, wait 15–20 minutes, and check for colour change, fading or texture damage before you clean the visible area.

What You Will Need

• Vacuum cleaner with a beater-bar or brush setting

• Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) — about 1 cup (roughly 200 g) for a medium rug

• Mild dish soap or a gentle carpet shampoo

• Clean white cloths or towels; a soft-bristle brush

• A bucket of cool or lukewarm water

• White vinegar (for odour and some stains, used diluted — see below)

• Rubber gloves if you are handling dirty water

Weekly Routine

• **Vacuum slowly, in both directions.** Go over the rug lengthways, then across. Slow passes pick up far more dirt than quick ones.

• **Vacuum both sides.** Flip the rug over (if small enough) and vacuum the back too — grit trapped underneath wears fibres from below.

• **Shake or beat it outdoors once a month.** Hang it over a railing or line and beat it with a broom handle or shake it well.

• **Rotate the rug every 3–6 months** to even out wear and fading from sunlight and foot traffic.

• **Use a rug pad underneath** to stop slipping, cushion the fibres, and keep dirt from grinding between rug and floor.

Spot Cleaning Fresh Spills — Act Fast

• **Blot, never rub.** Press a clean white cloth or paper towel onto the spill and lift. Rubbing pushes the stain deeper and frays fibres. Keep blotting with a fresh part of the cloth until no more colour transfers.

• **Scrape up solids first** with a blunt knife or spoon before touching the stain with a cloth.

• **Dab with plain cool water**, working from the outside of the stain inward so it does not spread.

• **Use a mild soapy solution if needed:** 1 teaspoon of mild dish soap in 1 cup (240 ml) of cool water. Dampen a cloth in it — do not pour it directly on the rug — blot the stain, then blot again with a cloth dampened in plain water to rinse out the soap. Leftover soap attracts dirt, so rinse well.

• **Dry the spot straight away.** Press dry towels onto the area, then let it air-dry completely. Never leave a damp patch — it can smell musty and grow mould.

• **Pet accidents:** blot up as much as possible, clean with the soapy solution, then blot with a mix of 1 part white vinegar to 2 parts cool water to neutralise odour. Rinse by blotting with plain water and dry thoroughly.

Deep Cleaning — Every 3–6 Months

• **Vacuum both sides thoroughly first** so loose dirt does not turn into mud.

• **Sprinkle baking soda generously** over the whole rug — about 1 cup (200 g) for a medium rug, more for a large one. Work it lightly into the fibres with a soft brush.

• **Leave it for at least 30 minutes — overnight is better.** For a very stale rug, leave it 8 hours or overnight.

• **Vacuum it all up**, going over the rug slowly, twice, until no white powder remains.

• **Spot-wash any remaining marks** with the soapy solution, applied with a damp cloth, then rinsed by blotting with plain water. Work in small sections, about 60 cm at a time.

• **Washable cotton or synthetic rugs only:** if the care label allows, hand-wash in a bathtub with cool water and a small amount of mild detergent. Gently press and lift the rug in the water — never wring or twist it hard. Drain, rinse with clean cool water until the water runs clear, then roll the rug in clean towels to press out water.

• **Never soak jute, sisal, silk, wool or antique rugs.** For these, stick to vacuuming, baking soda and light spot cleaning only, and call a professional for a full deep clean.

Drying — The Step People Skip

• Lay the rug flat in a well-ventilated room, or hang it over a railing outdoors out of direct strong sun.

• Point a fan at it and open windows if you can. Flip it after a few hours so both sides dry.

• Do not put it back on the floor until it is completely dry to the touch on both sides — this can take 6–24 hours.

• Never use a hot hairdryer or place a wet rug on a radiator — heat can shrink fibres and set stains.

Odour Removal

• Sprinkle baking soda over the rug, leave overnight (8 hours), and vacuum thoroughly in the morning.

• For a stubborn smell, lightly mist (do not soak) the rug with 1 part white vinegar to 2 parts water, let it air-dry fully, then vacuum again. Test a hidden corner first — vinegar is not suitable for silk or some natural-fibre rugs.

• Keep the room ventilated while it dries. Fresh air does more for a rug smell than any spray.

What NOT to Do

• Do not rub stains — blot only.

• Do not pour cleaner directly onto the rug — always apply it with a damp cloth.

• Do not use bleach on a rug unless the care label explicitly allows it.

• Do not use very hot water on wool, silk or glued-back rugs.

• Do not steam-clean a rug unless the care label says it is safe, and never steam-clean jute, sisal or silk.
• Do not leave a rug damp on a wooden floor — trapped moisture can damage both the rug and the floor.
• Do not skip the hidden-spot test, especially on coloured or patterned rugs.

Tick-Off Checklist

- ☐ Care label checked — rug material identified
- ☐ Cleaner tested on a hidden corner, waited 15–20 minutes, no damage
- ☐ Rug vacuumed slowly in both directions
- ☐ Rug flipped and vacuumed on the back
- ☐ Rug shaken or beaten outdoors
- ☐ Spills blotted (never rubbed), working from outside inward
- ☐ Soapy solution used sparingly (1 tsp dish soap in 1 cup / 240 ml cool water) and rinsed by blotting
- ☐ Baking soda sprinkled (about 1 cup / 200 g) and left 30 minutes to overnight
- ☐ Baking soda vacuumed up completely
- ☐ Washable rug hand-washed gently only if the label allows — never soaked if jute, sisal, silk, wool or antique
- ☐ Rug dried flat with good airflow, flipped, fully dry on both sides before returning to the floor
- ☐ Odour treated with overnight baking soda (and diluted vinegar mist only if suitable)
- ☐ No bleach, no very hot water, no steam cleaner on unsuitable rugs

Notes