How to Clean a Washing Machine

Remove mould, detergent build-up and bad smells - and keep every wash fresh. Works for front-load and top-load machines, using vinegar and baking soda.



45 min	Monthly	2	Hot
DEEP CLEAN TIME	DEEP CLEAN	EMPTY HOT CYCLES	LONGEST WASH

Why it matters

Detergent, fabric softener and damp air build up inside the drum, drawer, seal and filter. That build-up causes musty smells, grey marks on clothes and poor washing. A monthly deep clean clears it - no special products needed.

You will need

- [ ] 2 cups (500 ml) white vinegar
- [ ] 1/2 cup (about 100 g) baking soda
- [ ] 2 microfibre cloths and an old towel
- [ ] Soft brush or old toothbrush
- [ ] Small bowl, shallow tray and gloves
- [ ] Optional: washing machine cleaner tablet, if your manual recommends one

Safety first

- Never mix vinegar with bleach - the mix makes harmful gas.
- Turn off and unplug the machine before cleaning the filter.
- Hot water will drain from the filter hose - go slowly.
- Check your manual first: some makers advise against vinegar in their machines. If so, use a machine cleaner instead.

Before you start

- [ ] Empty the drum completely and check pockets of the last load are not left inside
- [ ] Run the tap / check the machine can fill and drain normally
- [ ] Put an old towel on the floor in front of the machine
- [ ] Open windows or run ventilation - vinegar smells strong while it works

Step by step - the deep clean

1. Clean the detergent drawer

1. Pull the drawer out fully. Press the release tab (usually in the middle) and slide it free.
2. Soak the drawer and its removable parts in warm, soapy water for 15 minutes.
3. Scrub mould and residue from every corner with the soft brush, rinse well and dry.
4. Wipe inside the drawer housing in the machine with a damp cloth, then slide the dry drawer back in.

2. Clean the rubber door seal (front-loaders)

1. Pull the folds of the seal back gently and remove any coins, hair clips and lint.
2. Wipe all the way around inside the folds with a cloth dampened with a 1:1 mix of water and white vinegar.
3. For black mould spots, press a vinegar-dampened cloth onto the spot for 10 minutes, then scrub gently with the soft brush.
4. Wipe again with a clean cloth dampened with plain water, then dry the folds thoroughly.

Top-loaders: skip the seal. Instead, wipe under the lid rim, around the agitator base (if fitted) and the top edge of the drum.

3. Run two empty hot cycles - drum clean

1. **Cycle 1 - vinegar:** Pour 2 cups white vinegar into the detergent drawer (front-load) or directly into the drum (top-load). Run the longest, hottest empty wash.
2. **Cycle 2 - baking soda:** Sprinkle 1/2 cup baking soda directly into the drum. Run another long, hot empty wash.
3. Do not put vinegar and baking soda in together - they neutralise each other. Two separate cycles clean far better.
4. When the second cycle ends, wipe the drum dry and leave the door or lid open.

4. Clean the drain pump filter

1. With the machine off and unplugged, open the small flap at the bottom front (most front-loaders).
2. Put the shallow tray and towel underneath. Unscrew the drain hose cap first and let the water run out slowly.
3. Unscrew the filter, pull out lint, coins and hair, rinse the filter under the tap and wipe the housing.
4. Screw the filter back in firmly, close the hose cap and the flap. A loose filter leaks.

Top-loaders often have lint filters inside the drum or agitator - lift them out, rinse them and click them back in. Check your manual for the location.

Finish, then keep it fresh

5. Exterior and final wipe

- [ ] Wipe the door glass inside and out with a damp microfibre cloth
- [ ] Wipe the control panel with a barely damp cloth - keep water out of buttons and dials
- [ ] Wipe the top and sides, and clean behind the machine if you can reach safely
- [ ] Leave the door or lid and the detergent drawer open to dry completely

Monthly deep-clean checklist

- [ ] Detergent drawer soaked, scrubbed and dried
- [ ] Door seal folds wiped and dried (or lid rim on a top-loader)
- [ ] Empty hot wash with vinegar completed
- [ ] Empty hot wash with baking soda completed
- [ ] Drain pump / lint filter emptied and rinsed
- [ ] Drum, door glass and exterior wiped dry
- [ ] Door, lid and drawer left open to air

Good habits - every week

- [ ] Leave the door or lid open after every wash so the drum dries
- [ ] Wipe the seal dry after the last wash of the day
- [ ] Use the right detergent dose - too much leaves residue and smells
- [ ] Take wet laundry out promptly; do not leave it sitting overnight
- [ ] Once a week, run an empty hot rinse if you mostly wash on cold

If something still smells or looks wrong

Problem	What to try
Musty smell returns quickly	Repeat the two hot cycles, clean the filter, and leave the door open between washes for a full week.
Black mould on the seal	Repeat the vinegar compress. If the seal is cracked or the mould will not shift, replace the seal.
Grey marks on clothes	Cut detergent dose, clean the drawer, and run the baking soda cycle again.
Machine drains slowly	Clean the drain pump filter again and check the drain hose is not kinked.

Notes

Tip: Note the date of each deep clean here. Monthly is enough for most homes - do it every 2 weeks if you wash daily or mostly on cold cycles.