How to Clean Window Tracks and Screens

Clear tracks, clean screens, brighter rooms — with pantry basics only.

Dirty tracks and screens make even clean glass look dull, and they let dust and pollen blow into your home every time you open a window. Set aside about 20–30 minutes per window, and work on a mild day when you can leave windows open to dry.

Safety — Please Read First

- Never force a stuck window open or closed — forcing it can crack the glass, bend the frame, or break the mechanism. Clean what you can reach and call a window repair professional if a window will not budge.
- Work from inside whenever possible. If you must reach an outside screen from a ladder, have someone hold the ladder and never overreach.
- Protect sills and floors: lay an old towel under the window to catch drips and dirty water.
- Spray glass cleaner on the cloth, not on the screen — the fine mesh traps residue and can leave a film.
- Wear gloves if you have sensitive skin, and keep cleaning solutions away from children and pets.

What You Will Need

- Vacuum cleaner with a crevice / brush attachment (or a handheld vacuum)
- Old toothbrush or stiff grout brush
- Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) — about 2 tablespoons per track
- Distilled white vinegar (5%) — about 1/4 cup (60 ml) per track
- Mild dish soap — 1 teaspoon per 4 litres of warm water
- Spray bottle, clean cloths, an old towel, a soft sponge
- Bucket of warm water; garden hose or shower head (for removable screens)
- Paper towels or a dry microfibre cloth

Part 1 — Window Tracks

Clean the tracks before you wash the glass, so dirty water does not splash onto clean panes.

1. Vacuum out the loose dirt (2–3 minutes per track)

Open the window fully. Run the vacuum's crevice tool along the entire track, top and bottom, getting into the corners. Follow with the brush attachment to loosen stuck-on dust. If no attachment fits, use a dry paintbrush to sweep debris into a dustpan.

2. Baking soda and vinegar (10 minutes)

Sprinkle about 2 tablespoons of baking soda evenly along the track. Spray or slowly pour about 1/4 cup (60 ml) of white vinegar over it. It will fizz — that reaction loosens the grime. Leave it to work for 10 minutes. Do not let it dry completely; if it starts drying, mist it lightly with water.

3. Scrub the track (5 minutes)

Use an old toothbrush to scrub along the track, paying special attention to corners and the grooves where the rollers sit. For stubborn, caked-on grime, make a paste of 3 tablespoons of baking soda mixed with 1 tablespoon of water, spread it on the spot, leave it for 10 minutes, then scrub again.

4. Wipe and rinse

Wipe up the loosened grime with a damp cloth, rinsing the cloth often in clean water. For a final rinse, dampen a cloth in plain water and wipe the track again so no baking soda residue is left behind — residue attracts new dust. Dry the track with a dry cloth or paper towel.

5. Clear the drain (weep) holes

Most window frames have small weep holes at the bottom of the outside track that let rainwater escape. Poke them gently clear with a toothpick or a thin wire — never force anything sharp into the frame. If water pools in the track after rain, blocked weep holes are usually the cause.

6. Lubricate the track (optional, sliding windows only)

Once the track is completely dry, spray a small amount of silicone lubricant (not oil-based, which attracts dust) onto a cloth and wipe it along the track. Slide the window back and forth a few times to spread it.

Part 2 — Window Screens

1. Remove the screen carefully

Most screens lift out by pushing the frame up and pulling the bottom toward you, or by releasing small tabs or clips at the sides. Note how yours comes out before you force anything — if it will not move, leave it in place and clean it where it is. Lay removed screens flat on a clean surface outside or in the bathtub.

2. Brush off loose dust

Brush both sides of the screen with a dry soft brush, a vacuum brush attachment, or a lint roller. Work top to bottom so dust falls away from the cleaned area.

3. Wash the screen

Mix 1 teaspoon of mild dish soap in 4 litres of warm water. Dip a soft sponge or cloth in the solution and wipe both sides of the screen gently — do not press hard, as the mesh can stretch or tear. For removable screens, you can rinse gently with a garden hose on a low-pressure setting, or with a shower head. Never use a pressure washer on a screen; it will tear the mesh.

4. Rinse and dry

Rinse with clean water and let the screen air-dry completely — about 30–60 minutes in the sun or a breeze — before reinstalling. A damp screen traps moisture against the frame and can cause mould spots.

5. Reinstall and check for tears

Slot the screen back the same way it came out and make sure it sits flush with no gaps at the edges. Small holes (under about 1 cm) can be patched with a clear screen repair patch or a dab of clear nail polish on the edges of the tear. Larger tears need the mesh replaced — a hardware store can re-screen a frame cheaply.

If the screen cannot be removed: clean it in place. Vacuum both sides, then wipe with a cloth dampened in the soapy solution, followed by a clean damp cloth. Put a towel on the sill to catch drips.

How Often to Clean

- Tracks: every 3–6 months, or whenever a window starts sticking or looking grimy.

• Screens: at least twice a year — once in spring and once in autumn — and more often near a busy road, in a dusty area, or during high pollen season.

• Quick in-between clean: a 2-minute vacuum of the tracks when you wash the windows keeps grime from building up.

What NOT to Do

• Do not use bleach on window tracks — it can discolour aluminium frames and damage seals.

• Do not use abrasive pads or steel wool on tracks or frames — they scratch the finish and create grooves that trap even more dirt.

• Do not pour buckets of water into the track — it can seep into the wall and damage the frame seals. Always use a damp cloth, not a flood.

• Do not use a pressure washer on screens or frames — it tears mesh and forces water into seals.

• Do not force a stuck window, screen tab, or clip — if something will not move, stop and check how it is fitted, or get help.

Tick-Off Checklist

Tick each step as you finish it.

- ☐ Old towel laid under the window to protect the sill and floor
- ☐ Window opened fully (not forced) and track vacuumed with the crevice tool
- ☐ Baking soda (about 2 tbsp) sprinkled along the track
- ☐ White vinegar (about 1/4 cup / 60 ml) sprayed over the baking soda, left 10 minutes
- ☐ Track scrubbed with an old toothbrush, including corners and roller grooves
- ☐ Stubborn grime treated with baking soda paste (3 tbsp + 1 tbsp water, 10 minutes) if needed
- ☐ Track wiped clean with a damp cloth, rinsed, and dried
- ☐ Drain (weep) holes cleared gently with a toothpick
- ☐ Silicone lubricant applied to a dry sliding track (optional)
- ☐ Screen removed carefully (or left in place if it will not budge)
- ☐ Screen brushed on both sides to remove loose dust
- ☐ Screen washed with soapy water (1 tsp dish soap per 4 litres warm water)
- ☐ Screen rinsed gently and air-dried completely (30–60 minutes)
- ☐ Screen reinstalled flush, with no gaps, and checked for tears
- ☐ Small tears patched, or larger tears noted for re-screening

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