

Laundry Stains 101:

(a.k.a. Domesticity On The Spot)

From the archives of Katie Campbell, Moonlighting Mayor of Domesticity, I share with you yet another chapter of "why do I know this stuff" as a public service ...

The Golden Rules:

- **Act Quickly**
- For a liquid:
 - gently blot up any excess with a white cloth or cotton swab
 - work from the outside in so that you don't spread the stain further
 - Do **not** press hard or rub
- Sprinkle oily stains with an absorbent
- If it's a dollop of something, (like ketchup or salsa):
 - scoop off any excess, again **from the outside in** to avoid spreading the stain further
 - dab the area with cold water, which will lighten most spots and remove some altogether

| [jump to fabric first aid chart](#) |

My disclaimer:

There is no single technique or product that takes care of every spot and spill. If a garment isn't washable, the safest thing is to take it to a dry cleaner; Show them the stain and tell them what it is (if you know). If you wanna make really sure that these treatments don't do more harm than good, test the technique in a hidden area (such as the inseam) before you attempt to slay the dragon.

| [back to top](#) |

Your basic tool kit consists of:

- **Your instruments:**
 - cotton swabs (ideal for dabbing)
 - an eyedropper
 - a plastic ice cream sample spoon
- **Combination solvents** (such as Shout or Spray 'N' Wash) particularly good on greasy stains on washables.
- **Oil solvents** a.k.a. dry cleaning fluid (such as K2R or Afta). Use for greasy stains on nonwashables. Use only on dry fabric, in a well-ventilated area. Air clothes after treatment.
- **Salt** when mixed with water works as a pre-soak treatment for blood stains.
- **Digestants** (my personal favorite is Wisk, but you can use Biz, Era Plus and the like) These are enzyme cleaners that eat protein stains like grass, blood and egg yolk. Apply directly to damp fabric, or dilute in water and then soak clothes. ALWAYS use cold water when treating blood stains. Wool and silk are proteins, so digestants should never be used on these fibers.

- **Absorbents** (e.g. cornstarch, talcum powder, Gold Bond Powder) When faced with a grease stain, gently heap the absorbent onto the stain, wait about a half an hour, then invert the fabric so that the heap falls off without spreading. Then you treat the stain.
- **Detergent** (e.g. any mild, clear liquid dishwashing detergent- the key word here being CLEAR). This is an effective all-purpose cleaner. Apply it straight, wait 5 or 10 minutes, then flush or dab with water.
- **Denatured Alcohol** (from the hardware store) Breaks down many stains and evaporates without leaving a residue.
- **Mineral Spirits** (from the hardware store) Use for exceptionally greasy stains like tar. Air clothes after using.
- **Glycerin** (from the drug store) is particularly good for ballpoint ink.
- **Bleaches** Lots of people gasp when I say "bleach." But actually, bleaches come in a variety of commonly accepted forms. Use the following mild bleaches wisely to remove the color left behind by stains.
 - lemon juice
 - white vinegar (mixed 1:1 with water)
 - 2% or 3% Hydrogen Peroxide
 - Ammonia (2 parts water to 1 part ammonia) **Note:** Do not use on wool or silk
 - Chlorine bleach (e.g. Clorox) diluted with water should only be used as a last resort because it almost always alters the dye of the fabric as well as the stain.

Method: Use a cotton swab to dab the bleach, or place a paper towel under the fabric. Use an eyedropper to flush the area with the proper bleach.

One last note about chlorine bleach: Bleach is bleach is bleach regardless of branding. Fragrance is the only difference between bleaches on the shelf at the supermarket.

| [back to top](#) |

Okay, now that you have your arsenal of stain removing tools...

FABRIC FIRST AID		
Stain:	For Washables:	For "Dry Clean Only":
grease (butter, oil, mayo)	Start with a combination solvent. Follow up with mineral spirits or oil solvent if necessary.	Use an oil solvent, then dab with cool water; dry flat.
proteins (blood, egg, grass)	Soak blood stains in cold saltwater first (about 4 tablespoons of salt to one gallon of water.) Use digestant. If necessary to remove color, flush with vinegar or hydrogen peroxide solutions, using an eyedropper to apply it.	Use dishwashing detergent, dab with cool water, and blot out excess moisture; dry flat.
		Treat the same as for washables, using water sparingly. Even if you can't see the stain, point out the area to your friendly dry cleaner, since

<p>fruits & vegetables (including juices & jams)</p>	<p>Start with denatured alcohol. Using an eyedropper, slush with vinegar to remove remaining color, then dishwashing detergent to remove residue.</p>	<p>any sugar that remains can caramelize when dry-cleaned.</p> <p><i>Note: If you haven't already, build a rapport with a particular dry cleaner owner/staff member -- you can't imagine how many more stains will come out of your clothes when you are nice to your dry cleaner. <wink></i></p>
<p>lipstick</p>	<p>Use a combination solvent to remove grease. Using an eyedropper, flush with vinegar or a mild bleach to remove remaining color.</p>	<p>Use an oil solvent to remove grease. Dab with vinegar to remove remaining color. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.</p>
<p>red wine</p>	<p>Use denatured alcohol, then with an eyedropper, flush with vinegar for remaining color. For sturdy fabric, coat area with salt, hold over a bowl or the sink, and pour very hot water through the fabric from above.</p>	<p>Use denatured alcohol. Dab with vinegar to remove any remaining color. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.</p>
<p>white wine</p>	<p>Flush with cold water, and wash as you normally would.</p>	<p>Dab with cold water. Dry flat. Even if you can't see the stain after it is dry, point out the area to your friendly dry cleaner, since any sugar that may remain will caramelize when dry-cleaned.</p>
<p>tea</p>	<p>Using an eyedropper, flush with lemon juice to remove color, then a stronger bleach if necessary. For sugar, flush with water. For milk, follow up with a combination solvent.</p>	<p>Dab with lemon juice to remove color. For sugar, dab with water. For milk, follow up with an oil solvent.</p>
<p>coffee</p>	<p>Using an eyedropper, flush with vinegar to remove color. For sugar or syrups, flush with water. For milk and/or cream, follow up with a combination solvent.</p>	<p>Dab with vinegar to remove color. For sugar or syrups, flush with water. For milk and/or cream, follow up with oil solvent.</p>
<p>wax or gum</p>	<p>Use ice to freeze wax or gum, or better yet, place the item in your freezer. Scrape or crack off as much as you can, then use oil solvent or mineral spirits to remove residue.</p>	<p>Same as for washables</p>
<p>chocolate</p>	<p>Start with a combination solvent for grease, then follow up with a</p>	<p>Start with an oil solvent for grease. Dab with vinegar to</p>

	digestant for protein, if necessary.	remove color if necessary. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.
sauces (tomato, ketchup, barbecue, etc)	Scoop off excess. Use a combination solvent for grease. Then, using an eyedropper, flush with vinegar to remove color if necessary.	Scrape off excess if necessary. Use an oil solvent for grease, then dab with vinegar for color removal if necessary. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.
mustards	Flush with ammonia solution, then wash with dishwashing detergent.	Try dabbing with vinegar. You may need the dry cleaner for this one.
vinaigrette (liquidy salad dressing)	Use a combination solvent for grease, then, using an eyedropper, flush with vinegar for color.	Use an oil solvent for grease, then dab with vinegar for color. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.
soy sauce or tamari sauce	Start with cold water and dishwashing detergent. Using an eye dropper, flush with hydrogen peroxide to remove any remaining color.	Use cold water and dishwashing detergent sparingly, then dab with vinegar to remove any remaining color. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.
mud	Shake or scrape off residue. For large areas, presoak in a solution of warm water and laundry detergent. For small areas, use combination solvent. Follow up with vinegar or hydrogen peroxide if necessary.	Carefully shake or scrape off residue. use dishwashing detergent and water sparingly. Dab with vinegar to remove any remaining color if necessary.
ballpoint ink	Rub glycerine into area. Let stand 15-20 minutes. Wash with dishwashing detergent or else spray with an inexpensive hair spray. Flush with water.	Rub glycerine into area. Let stand 15-20 minutes. Use detergent and water sparingly. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.
felt-tip ink	Flush with denatured alcohol using an eyedropper. Wash with dishwashing detergent.	Rub glycerin into area. Let stand 15-20 minutes. Then, using an eyedropper, apply denatured alcohol. Dab with cold water. Dry flat.

| [back to top](#) |

For More Information:

Now that you're not seeing spots like you were before, you might want to click on over to A check out Linda C. Cobb (another diva) 's ideas about laundry stain removal in her bible, Talk Laundry with the Queen of Clean . This little book is a wonderful guidebook to keep in your for quick and easy reference without a computer. The Queen of Clean also has some differer that may work well as alternates to my Tried N True ones here. Remember: Keep those Amaz coming through this portal, and DomestiCity will live on forever!



| [back to top](#) |

Credits:

Many thanks to Martha Stewart (and her 'Living' army), Herb Barndt, Janet Brady, Heloise, Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, SWHS Home Economics Dept, my mother for ideas and formulas, and Nick who made me realize that people really do wanna know this stuff.

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