



# ***Maintaining the Home***

## ***Carpet Care and Cleaning***

# ***Maintaining the Home: Carpet Care and Cleaning***

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Eventually carpets need some type of cleaning to remove soil that sticks to the fibers. How often depends on the amount of use and soil carpet gets; some areas will need cleaning more often than others. Some basic cleaning methods are placing dry absorbent powder or foam on the carpet, shampooing or using hot water extraction (sometimes called steam cleaning or extraction). Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Costs in dollars, time and energy vary, as do the skills needed to do a good job. Always vacuum thoroughly before starting any cleaning method.

Here are some general precautions for all methods:

- Pretest before using any method. Read the carpet label instructions before you begin.
- Protect the carpet from rust stains by putting aluminum foil, wax paper or plastic wrap under furniture legs until the carpet is dry.
- Follow the cleaner and equipment instructions as directed.
- Do not over wet the carpet. Excess moisture can cause shrinkage, streaks or mildew.
- Keep mechanical action to a minimum to avoid carpet damage or streaks.

## **Foam Sprays**

Aerosol foam sprays are available in most grocery and hardware stores. The foam is sprayed in a thin layer on the carpet, worked in with a wet sponge, allowed to dry and then vacuumed. Work in one

area at a time; otherwise, streaking may occur if the foam dries before mopping. Examples of this product include Woolite Spray Foam, Blue Lustre, Bissel 9201 and Arm & Hammer.

### **Advantages**

- convenient
- quick drying
- needs no special equipment

### **Disadvantages**

- best for lightly soiled carpets
- cleans only the carpet surface

## **Liquid Shampoo**

Shampooing is one of the oldest and most common methods of carpet cleaning. Mechanically operated brushes work a foamy detergent solution into the carpet. Excess moisture and soil are then suctioned away. When the carpet has dried, it is thoroughly vacuumed. Drying may occur gradually overnight or may be hastened by the use of electric fans. Use a recommended carpet shampoo that dries to a crystalline powder rather than a sticky residue. Examples of liquid shampoos are Bissell, Blue Lustre, Bio-Groom and Rinse 'N Vac.

### **Advantages**

- good for cleaning moderate to heavily soiled carpet
- brightens colors and fluffs up the carpet

- moderate price

### **Disadvantages**

- easy to over wet carpet
- needs longer drying time
- shampoo build-up over time can hasten re-soiling

### **Home Shampoo Formula**

Lightly soiled carpets can also be shampooed using a home formula of 1 tablespoon of light-duty detergent, such as liquid dish detergent, whipped with 1 cup of warm water to form heavy suds. Never use soap, ammonia (a dilute solution is sometimes necessary for removing certain stains), washing soda or strong household cleaning agents on carpeting. Soap leaves a sticky residue that encourages re-soiling. Harsh cleansers are not necessary and may have an adverse effect on carpet fibers and dyes.

Apply the dry suds to a small area at a time with a damp sponge. Remove soiled suds with a spatula and rinse with clear, cool water. Repeat the process until the entire carpet is cleaned; overlap areas as you work. Be careful not to over wet the carpet. When the carpet is thoroughly dry, vacuum it to remove any residue or suspended soil.

Whipping up your own shampoo may cost less money, but takes much more time and energy to do. In most cases it's much more practical to use a commercial rug shampoo, which is formulated to give better results.

### **Hot Water Extraction**

Hot water extraction sometimes is called steam cleaning, although no steam is used in the process. A hot water and detergent solution is sprayed onto the carpet under high pressure to flush out the dirt and soil. This solution is immediately extracted by the vacuum action of the machine.

### **Advantages**

- excellent for cleaning moderate to heavily soiled carpet
- can observe when the solution is soil free
- drying time is somewhat less than with the shampoo process

### **Disadvantages**

- some possibility of over wetting
- most expensive of the four methods
- equipment is heavy and bulky

### **Professional Cleaning**

Have your carpet professionally cleaned periodically—every third or fourth time—if this service is available in your area. Or you may find it more convenient to have it done professionally each time a special cleaning is needed, rather than doing it yourself. Professional cleaners use similar methods to home cleaning but they have the knowledge, equipment and experience necessary to do a more thorough job of removing embedded soil. Room size rugs and some wall-to-wall carpets can be sent to a rug cleaning plant. Professional cleaners also can handle spot removal, re-dyeing, rebinding and repairs. Always alert the cleaner to the location and cause, if known, of spots and stains that require attention.

When selecting a cleaning service, the main factors to consider are the operator's skill and ability. Ask reputable carpet dealers in your area whom they recommend. Satisfied customers also may suggest a cleaner to contact. Rug cleaners with a longstanding reputation can usually be relied upon to provide satisfactory service. They cannot provide guarantees, however, because of the range of quality and wear in the carpets and rugs they clean.

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Professional cleaners offering truck-mounted hot water extraction will have more power to remove soil and water than will a smaller, self-contained unit (like those you rent).

Mention of specific product names is for educational purposes only and does not constitute a positive or negative endorsement.

This material was adapted from publications produced by Michigan State University. Michigan State Cooperative Extension publications can be found on the Web at <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/>.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

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