

Care for delicate clothing

Although it is the era of machine wash and dry, there may be some delicate items in your wardrobe that still need special care to prolong their wear-life. Articles such as lingerie, wool knits and silk items can retain their shape and fresh appearance when washed and dried as their fabric demands.

Nylon is the main fibre used in lingerie today. Spandex, an elastic fibre, is added to those items which require stretch.

Lingerie made of these fibres can be machine-washed using the gentle cycle. Use detergent or soap dissolved in lukewarm water. Nylon's tendency to pick up and retain color from other garments in the washing machine demands that nylon items be washed only with other white clothing. Even if colors in other garments seem fast, they may run just enough to make white nylon things look "off white".

Dingy or greyed nylon that was formerly white can be immersed in hot water and color remover to restore whiteness. Color remover can be purchased where packaged dyes are sold. Follow the directions closely on the label. Avoid chlorine bleach which will discolor nylon.

Best results and longer wear-life are achieved if nylon and spandex items are line-dried. However, they can be machine-dried on a low temperature-setting for 10-15 minutes.

Pantyhose can be enclosed in a mesh bag and washed and dried as outlined for the nylon/spandex garments. If you wish to iron some of your nylon items use the "nylon" or "permanent press" heat setting.

Woollen knits often carry a "Dry Clean Only" label but they can be hand-washed successfully following a simple method.

The garment's measurements, such as chest measurement, body or sleeve lengths should be recorded before washing. Dissolve mild detergent or soap in lukewarm water then add the garment. Squeeze it gently, do not rub or leave to soak. When the item is clean, squeeze as much water out as possible (do not wring) and rinse at least twice in clean water. All the soap must be removed.

Roll in a thick towel to remove as much moisture as possible then lay it on a flat surface away from heat and sunlight. Gently push it back to its original size and shape as indicated by measurements taken before washing.

When dry the garment can be pressed using a steam iron set at the "Wool" heat setting.

Silk is becoming more readily available in medium-priced stores. Many consumers who had previously not considered buying garments made of this fabric may be considering it now. Most care labels on silk garments say "Dry Clean Only" but in fact many silk garments can be washed and expensive dry-cleaning bills can be avoided.

It's important that a scrap or seam allowance of the fabric is tested for shrinkage or running color. Measure the scrap (length and width) then wash in lukewarm water and mild, pure soap. Note any color running from the fabric. Rinse the fabric well, then let dry. Measure to check for any shrinkage. If no shrinkage occurs, then the garment can be washed. If the color runs, wash the garment separately.

As done with the test fabric, wash the silk garment with pure mild soap dissolved in lukewarm water. Squeeze the suds through the garment. Rinse well so no soap residue remains.

Roll in a towel to squeeze out the excess water. If you can't press the garment right away, roll it in a second towel and leave until you are ready to press it. Silk will yellow if left to dry in the air. Iron while still damp on a low heat setting, on the wrong side of the fabric.

Untreated silk can be easily water spotted. (Today most manufacturers are using waterspot-resistant finish.) You can test a scrap by sprinkling water on it and letting it dry. If the fabric does water-spot, don't use a steam iron unless the fabric is protected with a press cloth.

Delicate items do need special care so follow these cleaning tips to preserve their fresh look and increase their wear-life.

