

Comforters and Quilts

Most of us wash our sheets and blankets fairly regularly, but the other stuff—comforters, quilts, and pillows—often don't fit in our washers, or are made of materials we don't know what to do with. Professional dry cleaners know the best ways to treat these items to make sure they are fresh, clean, and stay in good condition. But if you know exactly what your items are made from, here are some guidelines for at-home care.

Everyday care

Comforters and quilts can be gently vacuumed to remove dust and allergens. Do not touch the vacuum directly to them; hold the nozzle attachment about ¼ inch above the surface.

Cleaning and Laundering

If you decide to wash your comforters at home, do not put them in the dryer; the stuffing may shrink or become clumpy and uneven (except for down comforters—see below). If line drying isn't an option (especially in rainy or cold weather), take them to a dry cleaner for a thorough cleaning and drying. How a comforter or quilt should be washed depends on its stuffing. Always check care labels to see what the manufacturer recommends, but if the tag is long gone or if it never had one, here are some basic guidelines.

Cotton batting

- Do not put quilts stuffed with cotton batting in the washing machine—the stuffing will get bunched up and clumpy.
- Hand-wash in a large laundry tub or bathtub. Use ½ cup vinegar to help dissolve all the soap suds. Do not put in the dryer—line dry outside, preferably in the sun.
- If line drying isn't an option, take the comforter to a dry cleaner to be washed and dried instead.
- If a down-filled comforter or quilt is relatively new or in good condition, it should be safe in the washing machine.
- Line drying is best, but down comforters can be safely dried in your dryer. Use the lowest heat setting or no-heat tumble-dry. Throw in a few clean tennis balls or clean shoes to help fluff it and prevent clumping. This may take 3 hours or more to dry completely.
- Make sure your comforter is completely dry before using or storing—mildew can grow inside damp down and ruin it.
- Do not over-clean your down comforter—the natural oils in the material may be stripped over time.
- If your down comforter is old or is wearing out, take it to a dry cleaner instead.
- Polyester fiber or poly/cotton blend
- This kind of comforter/quilt can be safely cleaned at home, unless it is very old or in delicate condition. Follow instructions on the care label for machine washing.
- If care label is gone, let comforter soak in the washer for several hours before running through the wash cycle.
- Add ½ cup vinegar to the rinse cycle to ensure all soap residue is dissolved.
- Put in the drier on the lowest heat setting or no-heat tumble-dry. Throw in a few

clean tennis balls or clean shoes to help fluff it and prevent clumping. Wool

- Check

the care label—if it is not marked washable, do not put it in your washer. It may be vulnerable to shrinkage or distortion. Take it to a dry cleaner.

- If it is washable, follow the instructions on the label. Other materials

- If your comforter or duvet has silk, velvet, or wool—even as a small embellishment—do not wash at home. These fabrics may be damaged in water. Take it to a dry cleaner to be cleaned safely. Patchwork quilts

- If

a quilt is made from many different fabrics, wash it using a method that would be safe for the most delicate fabric in the mix. If you aren't sure, or if the quilt is old and fragile, take it to a dry cleaner. GreenEarth solution is safe for antique and heirloom fabrics, but machine washing usually isn't.

- If a quilt can be washed in water, but is starting to wear out, wash it in your bathtub with gentle liquid laundry detergent like Ivory Snow. Make sure the detergent has been completely mixed before adding the quilt. Let the quilt soak for several hours.

- Drain the tub and rinse in cool water with ½ cup vinegar to help dissolve all soap residue.

- Line dry in the sun.

If the quilt is sturdy, it can go in your dryer. Use the lowest heat setting, or no-heat tumble dry. Throw in a few clean tennis balls or clean shoes to fluff it and prevent clumping.