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Extension Notes

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Cleaning a Front Load Washer

Do you have any opinions about front-load washing machines? Lab tests have determined that, compared to traditional top-load washers, front-loaders clean more efficiently with less water, less energy, and are gentler on clothes. Plus, the lack of a center agitator means front-loaders are a good choice to wash larger loads and bulky items such as comforters or pillows. Although front-loaders have some superior cleaning capabilities, they often come with two common complaints: mold and odor. This tendency for front-load washers to develop a sour smell and “ick” has caused some consumers to quickly replace their smelly washer with a new one or abandon the idea of a front-load washer altogether. Well, here’s a dose of good news: You can clean your front-load washer and prevent mold and odor from coming back. And if you’re still unsure whether a front-load washer is right for you, know that many new models have addressed mold and odor issues with “fresh venting” technologies.

For the best information

on cleaning your front-load washer, read your owner’s manual. Most are available online and include a section about cleaning and maintaining your particular washer. Some manufacturers will void warranties if you use products other than what they instruct. With that in mind, the following is a guide for cleaning and preventing mold and mildew growth, along with sour or musty odors. Before starting, make sure your washer and laundry product dispensers are empty.

Cleaning a Front-Load Washer

- If using a cleaning product specially made for washing machines, be sure to follow the directions.
- OR, instead you can use chlorine bleach (wear gloves and ventilate the area). Fill all the dispenser compartments with liquid chlorine bleach (not concentrated, not powdered) or pour about 1 cup of chlorine bleach directly into the empty washer tub. Then run a HOT / Heavy Duty Cycle (add an “extra rinse”), or choose

the special cleaning cycle if available.

- If you don’t want to use special cleaning chemicals or bleach, you can try vinegar and add it to the dispenser compartments. Be careful, however, because some experts say using vinegar (too much and too often) can dry out hoses and gaskets.
 - DO NOT MIX BLEACH with any other cleaner (including vinegar).
 - To clean the rubber gasket around the washer opening, gently pull back the flap and wipe inside with a clean cloth. To remove mold and mildew, wipe or gently scrub with a diluted chlorine bleach solution (about 1/4 cup bleach and 2 cups warm water). Allow the area to stay wet with the bleach solution for about 5 to 10 minutes before wiping it clean.
 - Repeat any steps as necessary.
- Preventing Mold and Odor**
- Do not overload your washer. Be sure clothes have

room to be cleaned and rinsed.

- Using too much detergent (or a non-high-efficiency [HE] type) can also contribute to the “smelly washer” situation. Detergent residue can build up on the machine parts, causing an odor.
 - Empty the washer soon after the wash is done.
 - Dry the gasket area and door.
 - If possible, leave the door open when not in use (or at least long enough for the inside of the washer drum to dry).
 - Also, leave the detergent dispenser drawer open when it’s not in use, to allow it to dry. Remove it and clean it every few months or when necessary.
 - As maintenance, run the “clean washer” or “tub clean” cycle as directed above about once a month (or when the washer indicates).
- Appliance Awareness: Did you know many front-load washers also have a “drain pump filter” that you need

to clean periodically to keep it free from lint and other debris? Check your owner’s manual to find out if your washer has one and if it needs special attention.

References

<https://cleanandhappyneest.org/wpd/how-to-clean-a-front-load-washer/>

<https://www.consumerreports.org/appliances/washing-machines/how-to-minimize-mold-in-your-washing-machine-a6065828553/>

Source: Jeanne Badgett, senior Extension associate for clothing, textiles, and household equipment

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