

Laundry room



Laundry rooms are an easy place to reduce or eliminate waste because the materials you use to keep your clothes clean creates mostly recyclable plastic jugs or cardboard boxes, and whatever cannot be recycled is mostly avoidable. The one item of trash that will remain despite your best efforts is lint. Because most of us wear clothing made from synthetic materials like polyester, your lint must go in the trash. The only exception would be if you only wear clothing made from natural fibers like wool or cotton, in which case your lint could be composted.

Reduce packaging

Reduce packaging in the laundry room by purchasing concentrated laundry detergent in liquid or powder form. You can also reuse containers by buying laundry soap from bulk dispensers. Another cost-effective option is to make your own – see recipes starting on page 50.

Consider going without fabric softener. Many softeners include ingredients that can cause allergies, worsen asthma, or cause skin irritation. Simplify your product lineup by adding regular vinegar to the softener dispenser of your washing machine. Vinegar does double duty in the washer as it can also help brighten your clothes. And don't worry, the vinegar smell won't last. Avoid products containing bleach if possible or minimize your use of bleach as bleach is a hazardous chemical.

Replace disposables with reusables

Swap out dryer sheets for reusable dryer balls. You can buy some or make your own (search online for a variety of types). You can also avoid static by hanging your clothes to dry. If you like your clothing to have a scent, use a homemade linen spray or keep a sachet of flowers, herbs, or cedar in your dresser. You can also use pieces of cloth soaked in vinegar and essential oil as a dryer sheet replacement. They are easily stored in a glass jar to soak before and after the load of laundry is done drying. Just run them with a load and then put them back in the jar to be ready for the next use.

Extend the life of your clothing

Get the most out of your wardrobe by buying clothes that last and learning about washing settings, stain removal and mending clothes.

Buy high-quality clothing

View your clothing choices as an investment. Buying high-quality clothes that last a long time and can be repaired will be less expensive and create less waste in the long run. Try to avoid “fast fashion,” where current trends are manifested as inexpensive items that are often made poorly. Fabrics that wear out or tear and seams that unravel after just a few washes are hard to repair. Follow these tips to put together a wardrobe that passes the test of time.

- **Be intentional:** If you impulse buy because something is on sale, it can leave you with cheaply made clothes that don't fit well or go with anything you have. Avoid filling your closet with clothes that you barely wear. Ask yourself “Should I buy this? How will I feel about this six months from now?” and be honest.
- **Look for quality:** Go with brands that have a good reputation for durability or a lifetime warranty. Check the workmanship starting with the seams by gently pulling to see if the thread holds the fabric closely together and doesn't show gaps or pull apart. See that any buttons or fasteners are sewn on securely. Feel the fabric to see how thick it is. For example, a thicker cotton shirt will last longer than a very thin one.

A note on dry cleaning

Many chemicals in the dry-cleaning process can be dangerous to your health and to the environment. Try to buy clothing that doesn't require dry cleaning, hand wash your clothes when possible, or look for an environmentally friendly cleaner that uses the “wet cleaning” process. Professional wet cleaning is a water-based, non-toxic, energy-efficient technology that uses computer-controlled washers and dryers to get your clothing just as clean as it would be if otherwise dry cleaned. Check with your local dry cleaner to see if they offer wet cleaning rather than dry cleaning.

- **Buy versatile items:** It's worth spending more for items that you can wear in a variety of ways. Try to buy garments that go with others in your closet. Search online for terms such as "minimalist wardrobe" or "wardrobe staples" if you need inspiration on creating multiple looks with fewer pieces.
- **Shop reused:** If you're changing your wardrobe or need to keep costs low, look for clothing at garage sales, thrift stores, or from friends. You can often buy quality clothes secondhand for what you would spend on a new, less durable piece. This is an especially good option for anyone who is still growing or adults with changing bodies or professions.

Washing and drying

When you do get a new (or new-to-you) piece of clothing, check the tags for washing instructions. The instructions will include the temperature to wash and dry the clothes and if they should be put in the dryer at all. Improper heat and impact from tumbling in a dryer can break down your clothes prematurely.

When washing clothing, micropastics shed from synthetic fabrics like nylon and polyester. These microplastics are not filtered out and end up in our water. To reduce microplastics from clothing, consider buying clothing made from natural fibers like cotton and wool and reduce the frequency you wash your clothes.

If you have a foldable rack or laundry line, use them to air dry as much as possible. Use cold water to preserve the fibers and color, and try not to wash your clothes if they do not need it. Unless it is soiled or stinky, you may be able to air out your clothing and wear an item a few times before it goes into the laundry.

Removing stains

If you spill, act quickly to clean it for best results. There are several options for removing stains with simple ingredients that can be purchased in bulk. Be sure to test fabrics in an unseen area before treating the stains, and take special care on delicate fabrics like wool, silk or suede.

Try the following to remove stains:

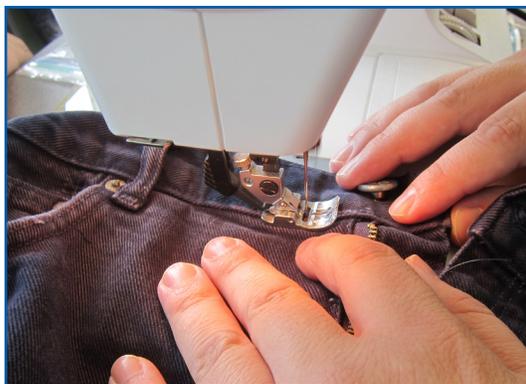
- **Baking soda and vinegar:** Works as a general stain remover. Rinse stain with lukewarm water and soak in a vinegar/water solution for up to half an hour before putting in the washer. You can also mix a paste of vinegar and baking soda to put on the stain.
- **Hydrogen peroxide:** Use for grass, blood, coffee, and wine. Dab or spray peroxide on stain and let it sit for 15 minutes before rinsing and laundering. This may bleach colors if left on too long.
- **Freezer:** if you have gum stuck to clothing, try freezing it for several hours then breaking it off

Heat from dryers can set stains, so make sure that the stain is gone before putting it in the dryer. Or consider using the power of the sun to dry and whiten clothing. Sunshine can help fade stains on light or white fabrics.

Another easy option is to designate a pair of "work clothes" that you don't mind staining, and always wear these for especially messy jobs like doing yard work or painting.

Mending

It is often cheaper to repair clothing than to buy a replacement piece. To mend your clothing, search for a video online, take your clothes to a tailor, or attend a monthly Fix-it Clinic where you can be guided through the repair



Disposing of clothing

When your clothes are at the end of their life, you can cut and reuse the fabric for rags, or the fibers can be recycled for use as fillers or carpet padding. Ask your local reuse retailer that accepts clothing for donation if they will accept unwearable clothing for textile recycling, or bring the clothing to a Hennepin County drop-off facility.

Make your own

See a recipe on page 57 for laundry detergent you can make at home.