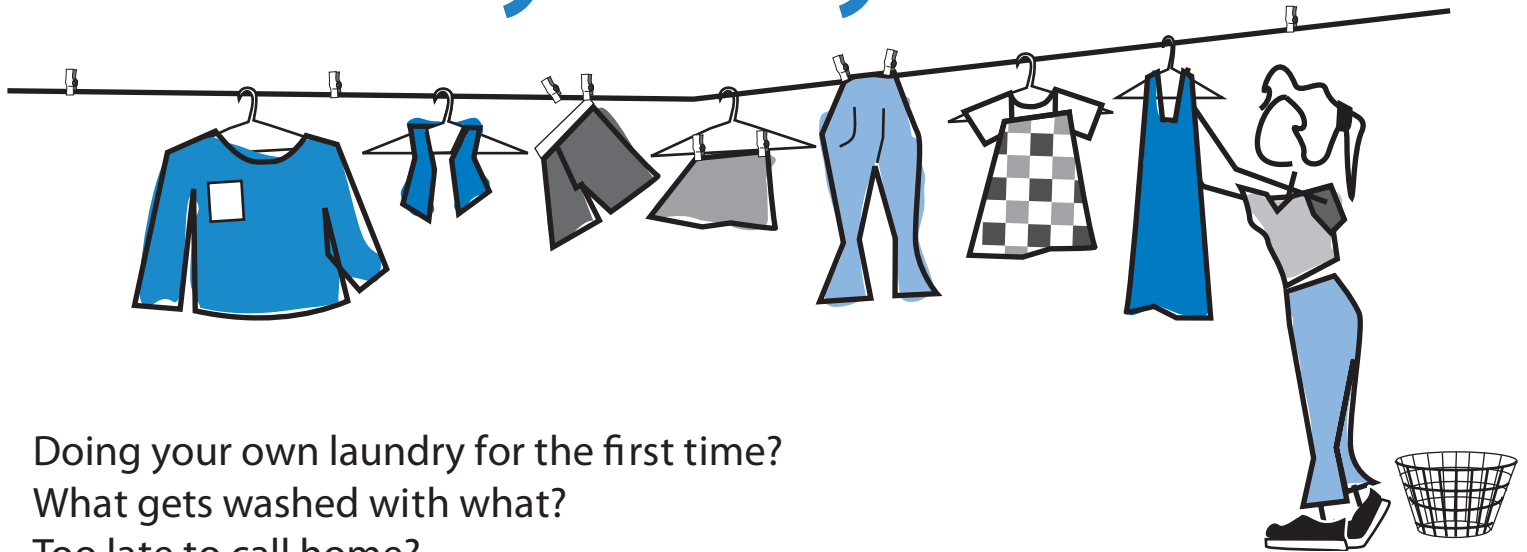


# Laundry on your own



Pamela J. Brown \*

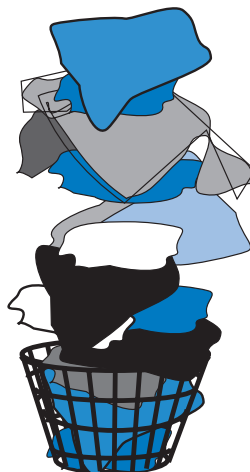
Doing your own laundry for the first time?  
What gets washed with what?  
Too late to call home?  
You're the only one in the laundry?

Hang on, help is here. You can take care of your clothes and save money by practicing good clothing management in your home, dorm or neighborhood laundry. Although the latest in washers, dryers and laundry products make cleaning easier, for good results, follow these basic procedures:

- Hang up your clothes when you take them off.
- Keep your clothes clean and remove stains as soon as possible – not the next time you go home to Mom's.
- Mend clothes when they need repairs.
- Read the care labels and follow instructions – don't cut them off; you may forget the instructions.
- Sort clothes before washing and drying.
- Follow the instructions on laundry products.
- When buying clothes, think about how you will care for the garment.

## Hang up your clothes

Clothes are made of fibers that bend, stretch, absorb moisture and attract dirt. You can save hours of washing and ironing if you just take a few minutes to hang your clothes on hangers rather than leaving them piled in a



corner of your room. If the clothes are dirty or stained, you may forget to treat the stain if you don't hang them up. And some stains are hard to remove if left untreated. That may mean you've ruined your favorite shirt or jeans.

## Removing stains

Spots and stains are easier to remove if they're treated quickly – not a few days later. To remove a stain, use a blotting motion; do not rub the stain. Work from the outer edge to the center of the stain. Be patient when following stain-removal directions. Retreat stains that are not completely gone; some must be treated several times. Do not dry stained clothes in the dryer or the stains may become permanent.

Check for really dirty areas such as collars and cuffs. Pretreat these areas before washing. Make your own pretreatment by using liquid detergent, a paste of granular detergent and water or use one of many varieties of pretreatment products on the market. Always check for colorfastness (that is, make sure the fabric color remains the same when pretreatment is applied) in an inconspicuous area of the garment, such as a seam allowance inside the garment.

Chlorine bleach is a stain remover. Use it only on white and colorfast clothes. Although bleach can also improve the cleaning power of the laundry detergents, it weakens fibers (especially cotton) when used repeatedly. That

\*Assistant Professor and Extension consumer science specialist; The Texas A&M University System

makes clothes wear out quicker. **Do not use bleach on silk, wool, spandex, noncolorfast fabrics or fabrics with a flame-retardant finish.**

Oxygen bleach is safe for colored fabrics and is most effective in brightening colors and whites when used regularly.

The Extension Stain Removal Guide L-5199 gives tips on specific stains and removal. Or, check out web sites on the Internet on stain removal. (Refer to the "Sources" section at the end of this publication.)

### Repairs

Repair holes and replace buttons on clothing so these areas don't continue to expand when washed. If you don't know how to repair holes or replace zippers or buttons, consider learning. Find a friend who knows how, or take them to a repair shop such as a sewing service or dry cleaner. Their services usually include clothing repairs. However, expect to pay a lot more than it would cost you to do the repair yourself.

### Choosing a coin-operated laundry

If you're living in a dorm or apartment, you may not have a washer and dryer on the premises. Though less expensive than dry cleaning, a coin-operated laundry can be costly. Sorting clothing correctly can save your money and your clothes.

Choose a laundry that is clean, well maintained and well lit. Try to find one with an attendant on duty during open hours. Look for businesses that provide tables for folding, hanging racks, and baskets for moving laundry from washers to dryers.

Although most have change machines, take plenty of coins (quarters and dimes) with you. It is less expensive to bring your own laundry detergent. Be sure to bring hangers. You may choose to disinfect the washers you use. Add liquid chlorine bleach to the wash cycle when you launder white clothes.

### Read care labels

Following the manufacturer's recommended instructions can mean the difference between a garment that lasts and one that can be ruined easily. Read the care labels in your garments. They contain care procedures recommended by the clothing manufacturer. New symbols are now appearing on garment labels. An explanation of these symbols can be found on the back of this

publication.

By law, manufacturers must attach care labels permanently. They are usually on the inside of the collar, neckline or waist seam, but can be on other inside seams. Although you can remove the labels, it is best to leave them attached to know how to care for your clothing.

### Sorting

Sort clothes before washing to keep colors from fading onto other colors, to prevent transfer of lint and soil, and to make it easier to choose the best water temperature and detergent for your clothes. **Be sure to empty pockets; shake off loose dirt; close zippers, hooks and eyes; and remove belts, pins and buckles.** Then sort the clothes by:

- Color:** Separate whites from colors, light colors from dark.
- Fiber content of fabric:** Fibers that can be washed together include cotton and linen; wool and acrylic; and manmade fibers (polyester and blends). Remember that some fabrics should be dry-cleaned only.
- Texture:** Separate smooth fabrics (such as polyester) from pile fabrics (corduroy). Wash fabrics that shed lint, such as towels made of terry cloth, separately from those that attract it, such as corduroy, velveteen and most permanent press fabrics.
- Construction:** Wash delicate items separately, such as loose knits, lace, or any item requiring hand washing.
- Soil:** Separate heavily soiled from lightly soiled clothes.

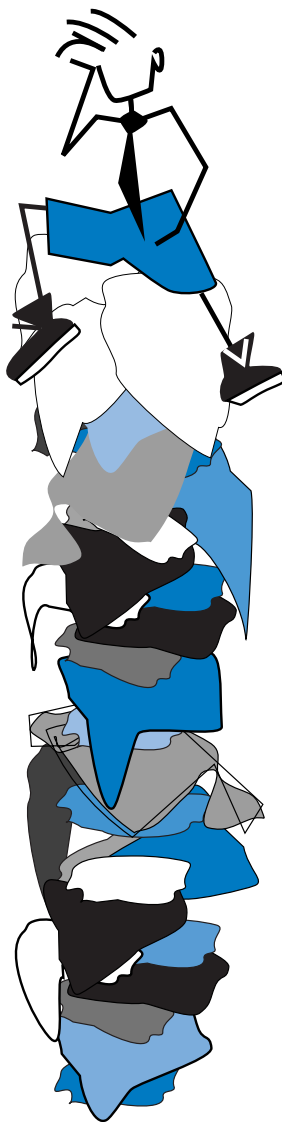
### Select laundry products and washing techniques

Many choices of laundry products are available today. Remember:

- Every load of laundry needs detergent to get clean.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for amounts to use. Measure the detergent before adding it to the water. More detergent may be needed for extra large loads, less for very small loads. When you use too little detergent, clothes become grayed or yellowed, and stains and oils aren't removed.

### Water temperature

All detergents work better in water temperatures above 65 degrees. Check the care



label instructions and fiber content for temperature guidelines. Use cold water only when care labels recommend it.

### Soaps and detergents

Read laundry labels and directions to choose the right detergent. Soaps are designed for light, gentle washing; detergents work to remove a variety of soil amounts.

Detergents are more concentrated today than in the past. Use the recommended amounts. Some states prohibit the sale of detergents containing phosphates. Non-phosphate detergents may not clean as effectively as detergents containing phosphate. Powdered detergents dissolve better in hot water than in cold. A powdery residue on clothes after washing may indicate that the detergent was not dissolved completely.

Granular detergents work well on mud and clay soils. Liquid detergents are usually effective in removing greasy, oily stains. Put detergent in the water first so it can dissolve and then add clothes.

### Loading the washer

Fill the washer with water, add detergent and then clothes. **Do not pack clothes into a washer.** Overloading washers can create extra lint, leave detergent on clothes and shorten their life. Place them loosely and unfolded, so that water and detergent can circulate freely through the clothes.

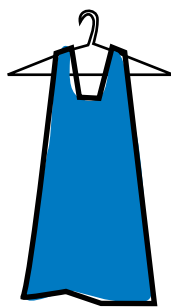
Vary the size of articles in loads. For example, wash large towels and wash cloths together, or jeans and dark shirts, or two sheets and smaller items requiring similar water temperatures. Never wind, wrap or drape clothing over the washer agitator. This could tear and damage your clothes.

### Fabric softeners

Fabric softeners reduce static cling, minimize wrinkling and soften clothes. Read instructions on laundry equipment and fabric softener products to know when and how to add softeners. Rinse-added softeners go in during the final rinse of the washer. Dryer-added softener sheets go in the dryer at the start of the drying cycle.

### Washing by hand

Read the care label. Some items, such as lingerie, should not be placed in a washer. Instead, wash them in a sink, handling carefully.



### Drying

Choose a dry cycle that fits the care label instruction. Generally, if items can be washed together, they can be dried together. Some items may shrink when dried. Again, read the label. You may want to remove such items from the washer and hang them to dry rather than drying in the dryer.

Shake damp clothes to loosen them before placing them in the dryer. **Do not overload the dryer.** If you are using a dryer with a removable lint filter, clean it before starting the next dryer cycle. If you don't clean the filter regularly, your apartment or house may be at risk of fire.

Regular cycles are intended for all-cotton fabrics. Use the permanent press cycle for clothes made of manmade fibers, such as polyester, nylon and acrylic. Avoid wrinkles by removing clothes from the dryer as soon as the cycle ends. Leaving them in the dryer will create more wrinkles.

**Do not over dry clothing.** Remove items with elastic bands, such as shorts, socks and bras, while slightly damp. Some touch-up ironing may be necessary on some items.

### Air drying

Read the garment care label. Some items should not be dried in the dryer, but should be dried on a flat surface or hung to dry.

### Buying more clothes

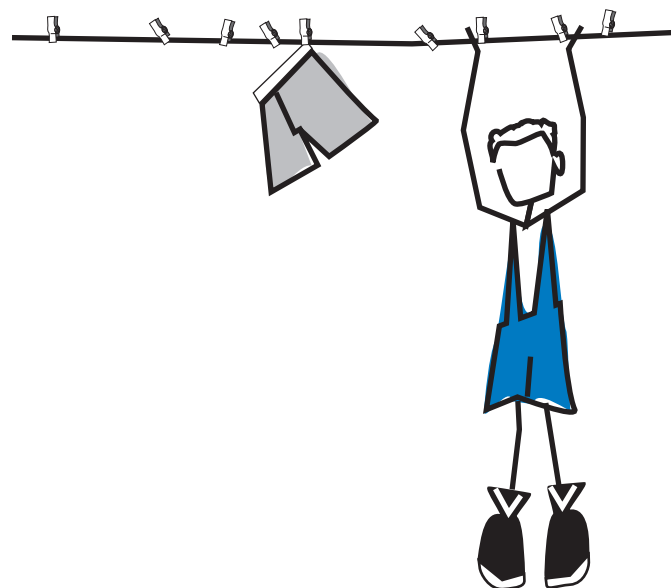
Now that you know how to care for what you already own, consider what to look for in your clothing when you are ready to buy more. Before buying a new article of clothing, ask yourself these questions:

- What does the care label recommend?
- Will it require special care, such as hand washing or dry-cleaning?
- How much will the care procedure add to the price of the item?
- How much will it cost me in time and money to care for this item?
- Do I have the right kind of products and equipment to clean this item correctly?

If you expect your clothes to last, you must take care of them. The appearance of clothing can be ruined during any of the steps outlined above. However, if you take time to care for and clean your clothes properly, you will save money.

NOTE: The water temperatures listed in the chart are provided as a guideline. Actual water temperatures in the home depend on the washing machine settings (hot, warm, cold), regional water supply temperatures and water heater settings.

<b>MACHINE WASH CYCLE</b> Normal Permanent Press/ wrinkle resistant Gentle/delicate <b>WATER TEMPERATURE</b> Hot (50°C/120°F) Warm (40°C/105°F) Cold/cool (30°C/85°F)			Hand wash  Do not wash  Do not wring
<b>BLEACH SYMBOLS</b> Any bleach (when needed) Only non-chlorine bleach (when needed)		<b>WARNING SIGNS</b> Do not bleach	
<b>TUMBLE DRY CYCLE</b> Dry Normal Permanent Press/ wrinkle resistant Gentle/delicate <b>HEAT SETTING</b> High Medium Low No heat/air <b>SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS</b> Line dry/hang to dry Drip dry Dry flat In the shade			<b>WARNING SIGNS</b> Do not tumble dry  Do not dry (used with do not wash)
<b>IRON — DRY OR STEAM</b> Iron High Medium Low			<b>WARNING SIGNS</b> Do not iron  No steam
<b>DRYCLEAN — NORMAL CYCLE</b> Dryclean Any solvent Any solvent except trichloroethylene Petroleum solvent only <b>PROFESSIONALLY DRYCLEAN</b> Reduce moisture Short cycle No steam finishing Low heat			<b>WARNING SIGNS</b> Do not dryclean



## References

Cleanliness Facts (1997). The Soap and Detergent Association, July/August. NY: New York.

Cleanliness Facts (1997). The Soap and Detergent Association, March/April. NY: New York.

Laundering Facts (1991). The Soap and Detergent Association. NY: New York.

Beard, A.V. (1989). Removing stains from washable fabrics Texas Agricultural Extension Service. TX: College Station.

Removing stains & odors from washable fabric(1986). The Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension Service. PA: University Park.

Turner, J.D. (September 1995). Stain removal methods for washable cotton and cotton/polyester blend fabrics. Textile Chemist and Colorist.

Adapted from a publication of the Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection.

## Sources:

<http://www.fabriclink.com/>  
<http://www.aac.msstate.edu/pubs/pub1636.htm>  
<http://www.sdahq.org>

## Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

[AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu](http://AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu)

More Extension publications can be found at [AgriLifeBookstore.org](http://AgriLifeBookstore.org)

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

Produced by Texas A&M AgriLife Communications