

How To Care for Winter Fabrics

By Amy Kennedy

Wool acts as a natural insulator to help keep us warm in winter but it can be tricky to care for. It is a favorite fabric of designers because it drapes beautifully, springs back into shape easily, and offers crease resistance. A few wool items can be machine washed and tumble dried, while other garments that are a blend of wool and other fibers do better when washed on a gentle cycle and air dried. Some garments that are 90-100 percent wool do best with dry cleaning.

Always read the care instructions inside each garment. If you wash a wool garment in your washing machine, play it safe by using the gentle cycle and using a detergent designed specifically for delicates like Woolite.

Treat stains on wool with cold water and seltzer and blot dry with a clean cloth. To help wool retain its quality and shape, be sure to empty the pockets between wearings to prevent sagging. Brush away dust to remove surface soil that could stain. Laying wool knits flat on a bed or table for an hour or so can help eliminate odors such as cigarette smoke between wearings.

If you are wearing wool in a rainstorm, remove it as soon as possible and dry away from direct heat. Don't place it in direct sunlight or in front of a fireplace or radiator. Don't place it in a dryer unless the label says it is okay.

Try to avoid wearing the same wool garment two days in a row. Give it a rest to allow it to air out and to give the fiber a chance to spring back to its original shape. Always fold wool knit garments and store them on a shelf or in a deep drawer. Hanging them on a hanger can alter their shape.

When it's time to store your wool clothing away for the season, dry clean it first to remove body oils that attract moths. Fold the garment and store in a drawer, large box, or garment bag with cedar blocks or mothballs.

Acrylic garments may be washed or dry-cleaned. Use a warm or cool water setting and add fabric softener during the final rinse cycle. Always machine dry on a low temperature. (Many dryers have a special cycle for delicates and knits.) Some delicate acrylics may require hand washing. Use warm water and gentle detergent and gently squeeze out the water while rinsing. Smooth the garment into shape and air dry on a rustproof hanger. Sweaters and circular knits should be dried flat. Use a warm iron to remove wrinkles if necessary.

Cashmere sweaters are coveted by both men and women for their softness, beauty, and durability. Hand washing is the gentlest way to clean cashmere but it can also be dry-cleaned. The fibers tend to become softer with each washing, adding to the luxurious comfort. To prolong the life of your cashmere garments, wash gently in warm water with a mild soap. Rinse in warm water and gently press out the excess water. Never use twisting or wringing motions, or you risk weakening the fabric and stretching the shape. Lay the sweater on a dry towel, smooth it gently into shape, and roll up the towel. Press to remove excess water, and repeat the procedure with another towel. Lay the garment on a dry towel and leave it to air dry. When the sweater is completely dry, fold it and lay flat in a drawer or on a closet shelf.

Removing stains from cashmere is best left to a dry cleaner. For long-term storage, place in a garment bag with a cedar block, lavender, orange peel, or cloves tied in a sachet.

Some winter clothes are constructed of a blend of microfibers that may include acrylic, nylon, and polyester. Most are machine washable and dryable as well as dry cleanable. Follow the label instructions on individual garments for the best results.

Check coats and jackets frequently throughout the winter season for dust and other particles that can work their way into the fabric and wear it down. Make sure you dry-clean all items before storing them away for the season. Not only are you preserving the life of the fabric, you are ensuring your garment will be nice and clean when you reach for it after months of storage. Try to clean scarves and gloves at least once a month throughout the season since they can harbor dust, germs, and perspiration.