

Coming Clean

From delicate stemware to indestructible turkey pans, the proper techniques to wash your holiday ware

YOUR CUT-CRYSTAL wineglasses, sterling flatware, and gold-leaf teacups are like the most colorful characters in your family: They are as high-maintenance as they are special, and you can't imagine a holiday gathering without them. No matter what the manufacturers say about dishwasher safety (see Dishwasher Do's and Taboos, page 140), you don't want to take chances

with Mom's dwindling coffee service, so pulling out the good stuff tends to mean spending hours up to your elbows in suds. (And, of course, no hostess gets away from a holiday dinner without scrubbing a pot and a cutting board or two.) Don't despair: While beauty certainly has its price, using the most efficient products and techniques can get you a discount.

“Freud is all nonsense; the secret of neurosis is to be found in the family battle of wills to see who can refuse longest to help with the dishes.”

Julian Mitchell,
As Far As You Can Go

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY HECTOR SANCHEZ

Dishing the Dirt

It's best to work from cleanest to dirtiest, most delicate to sturdiest: stemware, china, cookware. Your two basic tools (you'll need others along the way): mild dishwashing liquid, such as Ivory, and a nonabrasive sponge, like a Cadie Cellulose Sponge Cloth (\$3 for two, at grocery stores). Courage!



Crystal

- Place a **rubber mat** in the sink to cushion glasses in case they topple.
- Wash each glass in warm, soapy water, then rinse it thoroughly in warm water and place it on a rack to air-dry. Hand drying isn't necessary, says John Curtis-Michael, an event producer and the owner of John Curtis-Michael Special Events and Design, in New York City: "Streaking and water spots are almost always caused by the residual detergent from a bad rinsing job."
- Another way to be sure of squeaky-clean goblets, according to Jean Moses, special-projects director at Waterford Wedgwood USA, is to add $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of **ammonia** to a sinkful of warm water and dish soap. Note: Ammonia is harsh and should be used sparingly. It can corrode metal, so don't use it with gold- or silver-leaf objects.
- For stains like red wine dregs that have been left sitting, Moses recommends filling the glass with warm water, putting in a **denture-cleaning tablet**, and letting it dissolve: "It will get rid of the stain instantly."



Silver

- "Rinse utensils with hot water soon after use," says Sara Carcieri, spokesperson for the Sterling Style Council, "especially if your sterling was in contact with acidic foods, like salt, mayonnaise, or eggs, which corrode and discolor."
- Wash silver in warm, soapy water and dry with a very dry **cotton cloth** or a **quilted paper towel**.
- To spiff up silver before setting it on your holiday table, use foaming **Twinkle Silver Polish** (\$4, www.drugstore.com), "which requires a lot less elbow grease than other polishes and is easier on your hands," says Curtis-Michael. Carcieri says that **Hagerty Silversmiths' Spray Polish** (\$13, www.hagerty-polish.com) won't get gunked up in the grooves of intricately patterned pieces, and that **Hagerty Silversmiths' Wipes** (\$6) are great for spot-polishing just before guests arrive.
- When applying polish, use long strokes, not a circular motion, which can cause tiny abrasions.



China

- Wash with a sponge in a sinkful of soapy water—"the hottest water your hands can stand," advises Nancy Bock, vice president of education for the Soap and Detergent Association.
- Change the water often to maintain suds until the very last coffee cup. "The detergent emulsifies grease and oil and helps water sheet off surfaces to prevent spotting," says Bock.
- To remove coffee or tea stains in the bottom of a cup, says Curtis-Michael, swish 2 tablespoons of **vinegar** around in it, then wash as usual: "Vinegar acts as a bleaching agent—you can see it working."
- Rinse thoroughly with hot water. Again, the hotter it is, the cleaner the dishes: A temperature of less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit will leave a greasy residue. Also, the better you rinse, the fewer the spots.
- If you have enough room, let your china air-dry (or use your dishwasher as a drying rack). Otherwise, dry with a **cotton cloth**.



Wood

- Wash wooden bowls, spoons, and cutting boards in hot, soapy water, then rinse thoroughly with hot water and dry. Never let wood sit in water or it may crack or warp.
- While a sponge is fine for washing bowls and utensils, use either a brand-new sponge or a **soft-bristled brush** for cutting boards, to avoid transferring bacteria from an older sponge to the cracks and crevices left on the board from cutting and chopping.
- To get out tough stains, Curtis-Michael suggests going over the board with a **freshly cut lemon**, which will bleach and scour it.
- Brush a generous coat of **mineral oil** on wooden cutting boards every six months or so to prevent cracking. Let the oil soak in, then wipe off the remainder with a soft cloth.



Cookware

- For all metal cookware except nonstick and cast iron, Chris Sommer, a consumer service representative for All-Clad Metalcrafters, recommends **Bar Keepers Friend** (\$2.50 at supermarkets)—a bleach-free, nonabrasive powder—and a **soft cloth**. “Add enough water to make the solution soupy, as opposed to pasty, so that it doesn’t scratch,” he says. Even if you go the soap-and-water route with your pans, try Bar Keepers on tough grease, starch, and mineral stains.
- More effective on copper, says chef Anita Olivarez Eisenhauer, a lecturing instructor at the Culinary Institute of America, in Hyde Park, New York, is a mix of equal parts **flour and salt**, with enough **vinegar** to make a paste. Every time you wash your copper, she says, apply the paste to the outside and the interior of the pot and let it sit for 10 minutes. Rinse with hot water, then dry with a cloth. “It will make the copper shine and help release any bacteria or grease that seeped into the metal when it was hot.”

Dishwasher Do’s and Taboos

Although newer dishwashers can theoretically handle just about anything (unless it’s trimmed in gold or silver leaf), they might damage your fine wares. Some guidelines:

- **Treat china like china.** “Most dishwashers don’t have a temperature setting,” says Matthew Kueny, manager of the product-development group at appliance maker Miele, and if the water’s too hot, “china can get little black veins under the glazing, and crystal can develop whitish etching”—a breakdown of the finish and detail. A dishwasher’s china setting should be safe, but for anything particularly fragile, it’s wiser to hand wash.
- **Less soap is more.** Putting in extra detergent to get china extra clean can erode decorative details over time, says Kueny. For the same reason, don’t prewash, either. Powder and liquid detergents get the same clean results, but powder tends to be gentler on delicate items.
- **Let silver shine.** Avoid putting silver or mounted-handle knives, such as chef’s knives, in the dishwasher. Detergent weakens the joint between the handle and the blade, “and the process itself can dull the knife quickly,” says Kueny. You can run the rest of your silver through on the china setting, but it will be less shiny than if cleaned by hand.
- **Don’t mix metals.** Stainless and sterling flatware should be put in widely separated baskets. “When metals mix, free electrons move between the different surfaces, causing a surface etching, or burning,” says Kueny.

tip Remove your rings before scrubbing, especially crystal. “Diamonds cut glass,” says Denise Dinyon, bridal and special events manager for Lenox.