



# Carpet Cleaning Tips

FOR  
**DUMMIES**

Find out how  
to make carpet  
cleaning easy!

**A Reference  
for the  
Rest of Us!**

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Elizabeth B. Goldsmith

*Carpet  
Cleaning Tips*  
FOR  
DUMMIES®

by **Elizabeth B. Goldsmith**



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

## Carpet Cleaning Tips For Dummies®

Published by

**Wiley Publishing, Inc.**

111 River St.

Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

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ISBN: 978-0-470-14862-4

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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## ***Special Thank You***

The Carpet and Rug Institute would like to thank the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) for its assistance with the content for this booklet.

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# Introduction

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**W**elcome to *Carpet Cleaning Tips For Dummies!* Carpet is an integral part of most households. Some people think that keeping carpet clean and beautiful is hard work. It really isn't. Not if you clean it properly, with the right frequency and the right products.

## ***About This Book***

This book is designed to save you time by zeroing in on the best cleaning techniques and to help identify the products and equipment you need to get the results you want — all tested and approved by the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), the source for science-based facts about carpet and rugs. (For a look at the CRI logo, see Figure IN-1.)



**Figure IN-1:** The CRI logo.

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## 2

Please keep this book around as a handy reference so that when the merlot spills on your oatmeal-colored carpet you will know what to do. When you say “no problem” to the errant guest, you will truly mean *no problem*.

### ***What You Won’t Find in This Book***

You won’t find brand names or recommended manufacturers listed here. Also, I won’t be talking about carpet selection, installation, or placement; but you can find information on all of these topics and more at [www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org).

### ***Icons Used in This Book***

In the margins of this book you will find a series of icons that flag important or interesting information:



Keep an eye out for this icon! It marks information that you will want to remember.



The tip icon lets you know about something extremely handy and useful that may save you time or money.



This icon marks information that can help you to avoid making mistakes in carpet care.

## Chapter 1

# Why You Want Clean Carpet

.....

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Making your carpet last
  - ▶ Keeping your air clean
  - ▶ Protecting your investment
- .....

**H**ave you ever noticed that only a few days after cleaning, you can see dust everywhere, settled on glass tabletops and the like? Dust happens. Household dust carries bacteria, dander, mold spores, germs, and pollen. To add to the flurry of grime, your family, friends, pets, and even that open window bring in fresh dirt all the time. A lot of it is settling on your carpet.

Between longer work days, time-consuming commutes, and kids' activities that keep the calendar full, who has time to worry about cleaning the carpet? Today, we're spending less time on household tasks, yet we still expect excellent results. Lucky for us, carpet-cleaning products, methods, and equipment are improving all the time. Cleaning carpet may seem like more of a chore than dusting a coffee table, but properly cleaning and maintaining your carpet makes all the difference in the world.

## ***Preserving the Life and Beauty of Your Carpet***

With their rich colors, textures, and intricate weaves, carpet and rugs can give any room a homelike feel. But the beauty and life of your carpet depends on the care it receives.

Just how long should a well-cared-for carpet last? It's hard to say. Believe it or not, you can find some 100-plus-year-old Oriental rugs still in use. But generally speaking, ten years is given as a guideline for quality carpets that are well-maintained (12.4 years according to DuPont studies). Use manufacturers' warranties as a guide to how long you can anticipate a particular carpet to last. And look at those warranties carefully — large carpet manufacturers are tying their new carpet warranties to proper cleaning and maintenance with CRI Seal of Approval products. For more on finding CRI-approved products, see Part 2.

## ***Improve Your Indoor Air Quality***

Do you have allergies? Believe it or not, you can keep your carpet. Studies have shown that carpet is better at trapping allergens than hard flooring such as tile or hardwood. How can this be? Particles and allergens fall to the floor (out of the breathing zone) and onto the carpet. The fibers of the carpet trap allergens and particles, reducing their continued circulation in the air. Proper cleaning with a CRI-approved vacuum effectively sucks up the dust in the carpet, locks it in the machine, and keeps it out of the air.

Allergic to carpet itself? Not likely. Much of today's carpet is made from plastic fibers, which most people aren't allergic to. Of course, if you have wool carpet and are allergic to wool, you have a problem. In that case, remove the wool carpet and don't buy a new one, just as you wouldn't buy wool sweaters.



Don't worry about carpet and mold. Growing mold on carpet is hard. When carpet is kept clean and dry, mold simply can't grow.

## ***Avoid Premature Replacement Costs and Disposal in Landfills***

Proper cleaning helps protect your carpet investment and safeguards you from having to replace it before its time — great news because it also keeps carpet out of the local dump.

Maintaining your carpet protects your pocketbook; just keep in mind that spending money to keep your carpet in top shape is a small amount to pay when compared to the cost of replacing it.

And keeping post-consumer carpet out of landfills is an environmental goal benefiting us all. With more than 300 million Americans, and that number keeps growing, household waste is an environmental concern. Most school children today have learned the new “three Rs,” which stand for *reduce*, *reuse*, and *recycle*. If spending a little extra effort and, yes, money, on your floor covering helps meet this environmental goal, you may agree it's worth it.

### **Participate!**

Some communities advertise carpet-recycling days. As an individual or as a member of a neighborhood association, you can call the city or county to find out where carpet recycling is taking place and when. Buying products such as decking, outdoor furniture, roofing tiles, and automotive parts made from recycled carpet is another way to participate.

Nylon carpet tiles are a major ingredient for recycling into moisture-resistant wood-substitute construction products — even railroad ties!

The Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE) is an industry-government initiative that develops market-based solutions for the recycling and reuse of carpet. CARE started in 2002, and two years later CARE helped divert more than 150 million pounds of post-consumer carpet from landfills through reuse, recycling, and waste-to-energy programs. The goal by 2012 is to divert 40 percent of carpet from landfills. To learn more, visit [www.carpetrecovery.org](http://www.carpetrecovery.org)

## Chapter 2

# Finding the Right Products

.....

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Introducing the CRI Seal of Approval
  - ▶ Discovering more about approved products
- .....

**Y**ou expect carpet-cleaning products to work, right? Yet according to market research, a high percentage of consumers think that carpet is hard to clean. With all the products on the market, why is this so? In this chapter, I give you the basics on the CRI Seal of Approval and go over some ways to find approved products.

### *Getting the CRI Seal of Approval*

The Carpet and Rug Institute decided to find out why people think that carpet is hard to clean by working with an independent laboratory to test spot removers and pre-spray solutions bought off the shelf. Out of 25 products, only 4 cleaned a soiled carpet sample better than water. Some caused the cleaned carpet area to resoil faster, and — worse — some products damaged the carpet's color and texture. CRI also tested

## 8

equipment and found a wide variance in how well different vacuums and extractors clean carpet. In response to this problem, CRI developed the Seal of Approval testing program, which you can use to aid your carpet-care efforts.

The CRI Seal of Approval helps consumers identify effective carpet-cleaning solutions and equipment. Not all products clean well enough to earn this distinction, so look for the blue and green CRI Seal of Approval (see Figure 2-1) as proof that you're purchasing a quality product. Check out [www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org) to view all the products that have received the CRI Seal of Approval, and to see whether the cleaning products in your home pass the test.



**Figure 2-1:** The CRI Seal of Approval.

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As of the writing of this book, hundreds of spot removers, in-tank and pre-spray solutions, professional extractors, and vacuums have received certification. This number keeps growing as products are improved and new products are introduced, tested, and approved. Many good choices are out in the marketplace. It pays to shop around to find the best.

## *Seal of Approval/Green Label Vacuums*

Starting in 2007, CRT's Green Label vacuum program is merging with the Seal of Approval program to test the cleaning effectiveness of vacuums. This program will also test the vacuums for a positive impact on indoor environmental quality.

Better-performing vacuums provide a greater return on your investment and ensure a better indoor environment. But to earn the CRI Seal of Approval/Green Label, vacuums must pass the following tests:

- ✓ **Soil removed:** The vacuum must remove a set quantity of soil from carpet in four passes. Why only four passes? CRI tries to replicate conditions in the home, where the operator's arm gets tired.
- ✓ **Dust containment:** The vacuum mustn't release more than 100 micrograms of dust particles per cubic meter of air. You want all that dirt, dust, and pet dander locked tight in the vacuum — not escaping back into the room, falling on your furniture, and getting in your breathing zone.

- ✓ **Carpet texture retention:** The vacuum mustn't affect the texture of the carpet more than a *one-step change* (shop speak for "not very much") based on one year of normal vacuum use.

So look for the Seal of Approval/Green Label logo or label on packaging, displays, and on the machine itself.



Here are some other helpful hints for picking out a good vacuum cleaner:

- ✓ Look for adjustable and rotating brushes that can loosen ground-in soil.
- ✓ Louder doesn't always mean better.
- ✓ You want an enclosed high-filtration bag or system that limits particles from recirculating.

## *Seal of Approval Spot Removers/ Cleaning Solutions*

CRI works with an independent laboratory to test product performance using scientifically accredited cleaning standards. To earn the Seal of Approval, spot removers and pre-spray/in-tank cleaning solutions are tested on the following:

- ✓ **Overall cleaning effectiveness:** You want a product that removes soil and spots better than just using water, right?
- ✓ **Rate of resoiling:** This ensures that the product doesn't leave a sticky residue that attracts dirt to the cleaned area faster than the rest of the carpet.

- ✔ **pH:** If the pH of the solution is too high or too low, the factory-applied soil- and stain-resist treatments may be damaged.
- ✔ **Surface texture change:** The product must leave the carpet pile minimally changed after repeated cleanings.
- ✔ **Optical brighteners:** None are allowed, as they contribute to a yellow, dingy appearance over time.
- ✔ **Colorfastness:** Products must not be so aggressive that they cause a color change in carpet.

## *Seal of Approval Extractors and Systems*

What vacuuming and spot cleaning miss, extraction cleaning should take care of. CRI tests deep cleaning extractors and deep cleaning systems — the ones professionals use. (The *extractor* is the machine, and the *system* is the combination of that machine and a particular cleaning product, when following a set procedure.) Deep cleaning extractors are tested for:

- ✔ **Soil removal:** Extractors that remove the highest level of soil earn a CRI Gold Seal of Approval.
- ✔ **Water removal:** The extractor or system must remove most of the moisture resulting from a wet cleaning process. Dirty water that remains in the carpet could be a source of fungal growth and could prolong the drying process.
- ✔ **Texture retention:** The product must not harm the carpet pile.

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Before hiring a professional cleaning service, ask if their extractors or cleaning systems have the CRI Seal of Approval. If they do, then you know their products are rated highly and will perform well. For more on hiring pros, turn to Part 5.



Extractors that are typically purchased for home use remove surface soil only. Although your carpet may look better after an interim cleaning, the embedded soil remains and periodic deep cleaning is still recommended. And although these units may be handy for spot and spill removal, they're not approved by CRTs program.

## Chapter 3

# Fighting Dirt

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Keeping dust away from your house
  - ▶ Maintaining air filters
  - ▶ Vacuuming the right way
- 

**C**arpet maintenance is just like exercise! If you get into a routine and keep it up, you will see great results and feel better for it.

### *Containing Soil and Dust at the Front Door*

Ever heard the saying, “The best defense is a great offense?” Preventing dirt and grime from getting on the carpet in the first place is a great start for keeping it clean. The following sections give you some helpful hints that can stop dirt in its tracks.

## *Using mats*

Be proactive. Use outside and inside mats or runners, which work together to reduce the amount of dirt that enters the house. Choose wisely. If used outside, the mats should be made to withstand the sun and the rain.



Mats designed to hold water that drains from wet and snowy footwear should be kept indoors or under an overhang to prevent the mats from filling with rain water. Walking over mats should leave less water to track into the house, not more.

Mats work best if cleaned frequently. Vacuum up dry soil. Remove embedded soil from an outdoor mat by giving it a shaking, followed by a good striking with a brush. Some of the vinyl or rubber-type mats can be washed off with a hose or with dishwashing detergent mixed in a bucket of water. Soap them up and rinse them off when you wash your car. Then lay them outside on the driveway or hang them over a porch railing to dry. Always dry your mat completely before vacuuming.

Mats should not only function well, but also enhance the appearance of the home. They should be big enough to fit the size of the door. For example, extra-wide varieties are available for French doors. Encourage the family to wipe their shoes. Especially watch those golf shoes and cleats — they provide excellent traction on the course or the field, but naturally they carry grass and debris. Snowy or muddy boots also act as terrific dirt dispensers.

### ***Off With the shoes!***

To save wear and tear on carpet, some families make everyone take off their shoes before entering the main part of the house. Putting a bench in the foyer or mud-room makes this procedure easier, as do storage cubbies or bins that will neatly keep the doffed footwear. From a carpet-maintenance point of view, removing shoes is a good habit to get into. But be forewarned: Some guests and relatives may balk at the inconvenience.

### ***Cleaning Your Air Filters***

Change air filters as recommended by manufacturer's directions. Even better, you can select special models that remove more particles from the air. The more dust and particles removed by the filter, the less will fall in the carpet.

### ***Vacuuming 101***

It may come as a surprise that something as simple as regular vacuuming can also have the largest impact on the cleanliness of your home and the air you breathe. Removing loose soil while it remains on the carpet surface prevents dirt from being tramped down into the carpet pile. *Pile* is the visible wear surface of carpet, consisting of yarn tufts in loop and/or cut configuration. *Pile crush* occurs when those tufts become matted by foot traffic. You can help prevent pile crush with proper vacuuming.



Proper vacuuming is the easiest and most effective way to keep your carpet clean.

### ***How to vacuum***

On carpet, use slow, repetitive front-to-back motions in an overlapping sequence. A quick once over doesn't do much. But don't press down or make too many passes over the same spot. Instead, move slightly to the left or right about every four strokes. This method removes soil well and also provides an attractive end product — a fresh, no-footprints pattern, if you will.



Here are some procedures that can make vacuuming easier:

- ✓ When vacuuming, don't ignore those corners and crevices where dust builds up — you know, those gray areas around the perimeters of rooms.
- ✓ “Top-down” cleaning saves you the step of vacuuming again after dusting. Dust blinds, windowsills, and furniture surfaces first. Collect as much dust as possible in treated dust cloths and then vacuum away any fallen dust.
- ✓ Don't forget to check your vacuum bags. When bags (or containers) are half full to two-thirds full, remove and replace or empty them.
- ✓ In closets, store shoes off the floor in specially designed closet organizers to make vacuuming easier.
- ✓ Keep two vacuum cleaners in a two-story house, one upstairs and one down. To clean stairs themselves, work top down. A hand-held vacuum may do this job more easily than other models.

## ***Understanding the attachments***

Attachments allow vacuums to do more than clean carpets. They can tackle many other projects, such as cleaning bookshelves and other items that tend to collect dust. Your particular vacuum may feature some of the following or only a few:

- ✓ The *all-purpose* or *universal* brush works well on books and shelves.
- ✓ The *crevice tool* (long and thin) reaches into narrow slots and corners.
- ✓ The *dusting brush* details items that need a softer touch.
- ✓ The *radiator brush* cleans radiators and narrow spaces.
- ✓ The *upholstery nozzle*, as its name implies, is good for vacuuming chairs, sofas, cushions, drapes, mattresses, and fabric furniture covers.

## ***Frequency***

Generally speaking, you should vacuum at least once a week with a CRI Seal of Approval/Green Label vacuum cleaner that has a high airflow, high-efficiency filtration, proper attachments, and height adjustment. However, try to vacuum high-, moderate-, and light-traffic areas on different schedules.



The more foot traffic over your carpet, the more you need to vacuum.

The general formula is:

- ✔ Vacuum daily in high-traffic or pet areas.
- ✔ Vacuum twice weekly in medium-traffic areas.
- ✔ Vacuum weekly in light-traffic areas, using attachments at carpet edges.

What about stairs? The frequency of vacuuming depends on how often you use them. An active family with second-floor bedrooms needs to clean the stairs more often than empty-nesters with a downstairs master suite, who rarely venture upstairs.

### ***Setting vacuum height***

What type of carpet do you have in your home? Plush, Berber (named for a North African nomadic tribe), velvet, or shag? Each pile type may require its own height setting or vacuum model. Set your vacuum for the type of carpet pile you're cleaning, whether low and smooth or deep, shag carpet. Generally speaking, the higher the pile, the higher you need to adjust the base or vacuuming head. Do refer to your manufacturer's instruction book for guidance.

### ***Vacuum care tips***

For the best cleaning results, no matter what type of vacuum cleaner you have, inspect it periodically to be sure it is functioning properly. Additionally, follow these steps to keep it in tiptop shape:

- ✔ Keep hoses and attachments free from obstructions.
- ✔ Don't lose the attachments.

- ✔ Grip the handle, not the hose. I know you want to drag the vacuum cleaner by the hose, but for the sake of its health and longevity, don't do that.
- ✔ Keep brushes clean (for example, remove tangled hair) and replace them when worn. Typically, worn brushes are stiff, and they cause texture change on carpet.
- ✔ Empty containers or replace bags when half full to maintain airflow and cleaning capability. (Just like you wouldn't want to top off the gas tank on a car until it overflows, you don't want your vacuum bag to spill over.)
- ✔ Look for rough edges or bent metal on your machine that can snag carpet.



Locate vacuum repair shops or stores that carry replacement parts and vacuum bags that fit your model. Keep their contact information on hand.



## Chapter 4

# Removing Nasty Spots and Stains

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Avoiding stains
  - ▶ Cleaning stains
  - ▶ Using do-it-yourself extractors
- 

**W**ith today's stain-resistant carpet, treating spots and stains has never been easier. With proper patience and prompt attention, most common household spills can be removed. Or you could just avoid spilling on your carpet in the first place.

Preventing soiling and spills is all about planning in advance, whether for a party or for everyday living. But no matter how hard you try, spots and stains are going to happen.

What your carpet is made of will give you clues about which cleaning solution will work best. Natural fibers absorb more moisture than man-made fibers; therefore, drying takes much longer and the risk of tracking soil is far greater. Check the pH of the cleaning solution. Wool requires a neutral or slightly acidic pH. Man-made

fiber can withstand more alkaline solutions, which cut grease and suspend soil faster. Check your manufacturer recommendations if you're not sure what to use.

## ***Removing Spots and Stains***

Act quickly! Many spills can be removed when immediate action is taken. The longer you wait, the higher the probability that a spill will become a permanent stain. No carpet is completely stain-proof. So to knock out spots, give them a one-two punch.

### ***Step one: Absorb the spill***

Blot liquids with a dry, white absorbent cloth or plain white paper towels (no prints or colors).



Use of a printed or colored material may transfer ink or dye to your damp carpet!

Start at the outside of the spot and continue toward the center to prevent the stain from spreading. Blot until barely damp. Semi-solids like food spills may need scooping up with a spoon. Solid, dried bits can be vacuumed up.



Do not scrub. Scrubbing can damage the carpet because fraying and texture change is the likely result. Use a soft white cloth to blot the spot.

### ***Step two: Treat the spot or stain***

Use a CRI Seal of Approval carpet cleaner. Check out [www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org) for a list of Seal of Approval spot removers and cleaning solutions. Make sure to add one to your shopping list before an emergency arises. Though these have been laboratory tested,

### Avoiding the worst stains

What is one of the worst stains? Answer: Paint is high on the list. Don't take chances. Use a drop cloth during any painting projects, covering every inch of carpet.

make sure you have pretested any cleaner on a hidden area of your carpet.

Follow the product's directions carefully. Generally speaking, apply a small amount of the cleaner to a white cloth and work in gently, from the edges to the center. Blot; don't scrub. You may need to do this several times to remove the spot.

What if you don't have a CRI-approved carpet cleaner handy? Try one of these home-made remedies:

- ✔ **Use plain water:** Surprisingly, water often works better than untested carpet cleaners.
- ✔ **Use a detergent solution:** Mix ¼ teaspoon of a clear (nonbleach, nonlanolin) dishwashing liquid with 1 cup warm water. Try this on spilled wine and smeared chocolate. Never use laundry detergent; it may contain bleach or simply be too harsh.
- ✔ **Use a white vinegar solution:** Mix 1 cup white (not red wine or cider) vinegar with 1 cup water. White vinegar (5 percent acetic acid) is sometimes effective on *tannin* (weak vegetable dye found in tea and coffee), and it leaves no residue. However, be careful because acids can set some other dye stains.

For really tough stains and spills, such as fingernail polish or candle wax, refer to the Chapter 7.

## ***Don't Overclean!***



Zealous people can get into trouble when trying to remove stains and spills from carpet. Remember to:

- ✔ Properly mix solutions so you don't create too strong a concentration. In truth, more isn't better.
- ✔ Use the right amount of water and don't keep the carpet damp for long.
- ✔ Use the right solution on the stain or spill.
- ✔ Follow the manufacturer's directions. In particular, test the product on a hidden spot of carpet before applying it where all can see the results.

### **How clean is too clean?**

Did you know you could cause stains on your carpet by cleaning nearby items? Be wary of using anything wet on hard floors or furniture near carpet—especially harsh cleaning solutions and those with bleach. Also, be careful of tile cleaners, mildew removers, and oven and drain cleaners. Strong chemicals can permanently discolor carpet fibers.

## *Special Tips for Pet Owners*

Do you have a pet? Join the crowd. About 70 million U.S. households have pets — and that number represents a 35 percent increase from 1988, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Dogs especially have urine retention problems when they're puppies, elderly, or sick. For puppies, packs of 100 temporary absorbent pads can be purchased from pet supply stores. These work better than newspaper, so spread them around on the spots where your puppy tends to gravitate. When Fluffy makes a mess, throw the pad out.

Sometimes, when a new dog is introduced into a home where another dog has been, they will mark spots in the house in the same way they mark territory in the neighborhood. Cats also mark territory inside the house.

You can combat pet odors and stains in many ways:

- ✔ Check out the CRI Seal of Approval products that are specifically designed for pet stains and odors.
- ✔ Vacuum more frequently to capture pet hair and dust drifting from Fluffy's fur.
- ✔ Have your carpet professionally cleaned every 12 to 18 months, or more frequently.

In the case of a pet accident

- ✔ Clean up new messes promptly.
- ✔ Pick up any semi-solids with a spoon or spatula and then follow the steps for spot and stain removal outlined in the "Treat the spot or stain" section earlier in this chapter.

✦ When dealing with urine spots, don't use a steam cleaner, because the heat will set the stain and the smell. Extracting the spill with a wet-vacuum and rinsing with cool water will reduce the odor. Certified carpet-cleaning firms know how to permanently remove pet stains and odor, where possible.

If you have caged pets, check pet-supply stores for scent-killing products (mineral or earthen products sold in bags), which you place near their cages. Plain old baking soda or clove oil on a cotton ball may mask the stench. Place washable area rugs under pet cages to help trap spilled food, dust, and dirt from animals. Wash often.

If fleas should become a problem, keep in mind that your carpet is probably harboring eggs — keep up a regular vacuuming schedule! Check with your veterinarian for treatment options as well as tips for getting fleas out of the household environment.

## *Interim Cleaning and Do-It-yourself Extractor Cleaning*

If you have kids or pets or are a bit of a housecleaning fanatic, you may already own some sort of do-it-yourself extractor or “steam cleaner.” Do these take the place of professional cleaning? Unfortunately, no. For information on looking for and using a good professional cleaning service, see Chapter 5.

If you're a do-it-yourselfer, here are the steps to take for effective cleaning:

1. **Remove furniture.** If furniture is too heavy, place plastic film under and around the legs of furniture.

2. **Vacuum thoroughly.** This often has the biggest impact on the whole process!
3. **Follow instructions on the machine carefully.** Don't add other chemicals or underdilute in an attempt to make your cleaner stronger. The solution is designed to work best at the concentration recommended on the label.  
Use a CRI Seal of Approval cleaning solution that works with your extractor.
4. **Begin at the farthest point from the doorway and work back toward it so you can step out when done.** Don't clean yourself into a corner!
6. **Be patient and don't overwet the carpet.** Extract as much of the water as possible — don't rush this step.
7. **Wait until the carpet dries before replacing furniture or walking on carpet.** This may take up to 12 hours, most typically 6 to 8.
8. **Ventilate.** Open windows, if outdoor weather conditions (temperature, humidity) permit; or put the AC on moderate settings (72 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit). Never close up a room with a wet, newly cleaned carpet; keep air movement circulating. You want the fastest dry possible, to prevent mold growth and to allow earlier use.
9. **Vacuum again when the carpet is dry to pick up soil that wicks to the surface during drying.**



Do-it-yourself interim extractors aren't currently tested by the Seal of Approval program.

## *Keeping Things Clean*

You may want to institute a rule about not eating in the living room and bedrooms; but let's face it, most families would find this hard to live with or enforce. Instead, put machine-washable rugs or patterned synthetic oriental-design rugs under common drop zones, like in front of the sofa or under TV trays. If eating snacks or dinner in front of the television or laptop, use a mat or kitchen towel under plates and bowls.

Rather than restrict all foods and drinks, think about banning only certain foods from carpeted areas. Most people are aware of the gravity of red wine and tomato sauce spills, so your family may be more likely to follow this rule.

Immediately returning used glasses and plates to the kitchen can go a long way toward reducing soiling and spills. Children as well as adults can get into this habit.



**TIP** During parties, offer drinks and snacks on trays. This helps contain spills to the tray. Don't neglect to pick up after guests who leave half-filled glasses or plates.

## Chapter 5

# Calling In the Pros

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Finding out what to look for in a carpet cleaning pro
  - ▶ Calling in critter control
- 

**S**it down, relax, and let the professionals take care of cleaning your carpet. To keep your carpet at peak performance, CRI recommends getting your carpet professionally deep cleaned every 12 to 18 months. (Be sure to check your carpet warranty for particular requirements.)

### *Hiring a Cleaning Pro*



Regular professional cleaning is as important to your carpet as having a trained mechanic perform routine tune-ups on your car. The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification (IICRC) represents more than 4,500 Certified Firms and more than 45,000 Certified Technicians in 30 countries. You can locate a certified firm in your area by visiting [www.certifiedcleaners.org](http://www.certifiedcleaners.org).

### ***Asking the tough questions***

Don't be afraid to ask questions! Ask the cleaning representatives whether they vacuum before they clean. Then, ask what they do next and what equipment they use. They should apply a pre-spray following the manufacturer's label, and agitate the carpet's pile yarns to loosen and suspend soil. There should be a rinse and extraction procedure to remove soil and detergent residue from the carpet yarn. Find out how long the company has been in business in your community. Ask for client references. And don't forget to check whether they use CRI Seal of Approval products.

### ***Getting an in-home inspection and estimate***

Never go strictly by television advertisements or newspaper inserts or jump at the lowest bid. And don't accept quotes over the phone. Have the cleaning representative come to your home for an inspection and estimate. Obtain a written agreement before any work is done. Usually they won't charge for furniture removal, routine spot removal, or preconditioning. Make sure you aren't charged for any extras. Most final estimates will be based on square footage rather than the number of rooms. Get a written contract with the total price and statements of guarantees that the cleaning company offers.



Show the representative the problem areas and spots or pet stains that need special attention.

### ***Waiting for the carpet to dry***

As when cleaning carpet yourself, you must stay off the carpet until it is completely dry. And don't move furniture back in until you're sure about this.



If the furniture goes back too soon, rust or stains (from paint or finishes) could mar the carpet permanently.

### ***Tiny Critter Control***

Two kinds of carpet-damaging beetles exist: varied carpet beetle and black carpet beetle. These critters literally eat wool fiber and other natural sources of food, such as leather and dead skin cells, and can be difficult to eliminate. The larvae crawl from room to room hiding in baseboards, molding, and heating systems. Adult beetles fly in from outside and lay eggs.

Depending on the part of the country you live in and the wool content of your carpet, you may encounter carpet beetles no matter how well kept your house is. Synthetic carpet fiber is naturally resistant to beetles. Wool carpet yarns are treated to resist moths; this same treatment should resist attacks by beetles. If you find you have them anyway, beetle infestations should be handled by professional pest control specialists.



Frequent vacuuming, particularly of carpet under furniture, is the best defense.



## Chapter 6

# Cleaning Area Rugs

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Washing, beating, and vacuuming area rugs
  - ▶ Caring for finer rugs
- 

**I**n the rest of the book, I talk mostly about how to clean wall-to-wall carpet. This chapter gives you some tips for cleaning area rugs.



Some rugs are reversible. If this is the case with your floor covering, do turn it over after cleaning. If you can't flip a large rug, try turning it so that wear is evenly distributed. Rearranging is also recommended to change the way light from windows hits a rug. Sunshine fades rugs.

## *Washing Rugs*

If your rug is small and the label says “machine washable,” shake the rug outside first and then put it in the washing machine at the recommended temperature. Whether it is a bath mat or a small rug, use warm water (90 to 105 degrees) and a mild detergent. Wash the rug alone to avoid dyeing other items, although you may

need an old bath towel to balance the load. The rinse water will tell you if dyes are bleeding into the water. Take care with imported rugs and red or dark-colored rugs. It may take several washings before the rinse water runs clear.

Tumble your rug dry at the lowest heat setting. You can also put rugs on the line to dry. A shaded area or screened porch is recommended if fading is a concern. If you don't have a clothesline or porch, you can hang your rug in the bathroom, over the shower rod or a folding drying rack placed in the tub. Outside is best, if feasible, because your rug will dry more quickly.

### ***Beating Larger Rugs***

If your larger rug is easy to pick up, shake it outside first, then put it over a clothesline and beat it. If you want to be authentic, you can find antique rug beaters. But use your imagination. An old tennis racket will do! Then take the rug inside and vacuum it. If the label says dry clean only, then roll it up and take it to a dry cleaner. Save yourself some time and aggravation by calling first to see if the cleaners do rug cleaning — a lot of them don't.

### ***Vacuuming Area Rugs***

Area rugs with fringe require a special technique. Use gentle suction and start from the center of the carpet, vacuuming toward the fringe and being careful not to catch the strands in the beater bar. Lift the carpet edge to vacuum beneath the fringe. You may notice that

antique or heirloom rugs often have missing fringe — probably the result of over-vigorous vacuuming or playful pets. Missing fringe detracts from a rug's appearance and in some cases from its worth.

### ***Caring for Oriental, Turkish, or Persian Rugs***

Clean imported rugs according to your carpet manufacturer's specifications, or bring in a professional cleaning service. Be gentle with fringe. For heirloom-type rugs, you need professionals. They will need to know what the carpet is made of and how old it is. If possible, the carpet may benefit from a shaking outside. For professional help with cleaning high-value designer or Oriental rugs, consult [www.certifiedcleaners.org](http://www.certifiedcleaners.org).



If you own a rug of museum quality, mount it properly on a wall or store it rather than use it on the floor.



## Chapter 7

# Removing the Top Ten Terrible Stains

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**T**he Carpet and Rug Institute recommends using Seal of Approval carpet cleaning products. But when you don't have an approved product on hand or you have tough spots and stains, here are some useful tips.

**Blood** you should rinse quickly with cool water. Follow with an approved cleaning solution or a mix of ¼ teaspoon clear (nonbleach, nonlanolin) dishwashing liquid with one cup cool water. Blot and dry quickly.

**Dye and food stains**, such as beverages, medicines, cosmetics, foods, and other liquids containing dyes, should be absorbed first. Then try the liquid dishwashing solution described in the blood remedy. Blot, repeat, and rinse with clear water on a clean, white towel or a white paper towel. Dry. Depending on the substance involved, it may require professional cleaning.

**Fingernail polish** can be removed using a non-acetone fingernail polish remover. Apply a small amount of remover on a white cloth and work it in from the edges of the spill to the center. Blot the area using lukewarm tap water. Dry with a clean cloth.

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**Ink** (ballpoint pen) comes off with rubbing alcohol (70 percent isopropyl) applied to a cloth or paper towel. Don't pour rubbing alcohol directly on the spot.

**Paint** (latex) responds to the detergent solution described in the blood remedy. Blot, repeat, and dry. Other types of paint such as enamel or oil require other responses. Visit [www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org) for more suggestions.

**Urine or vomit**, left unattended, can damage carpet in several ways. Always clean these up immediately with paper towels.

For **pet urine**, try a solution of one part white vinegar and one part water and refer to Chapter 3 for special tips for pet owners.

**Rust** nearly always requires professional services because of the chemicals involved.

**Wax** (paraffin from candles) responds best when medium heat from an iron is applied to a clean white cloth or paper towel, which is placed over the wax spill. Repeat the heat application to the towel as the wax is absorbed. Sometimes dyes in wax won't come out, and fibers will have to be cut and the area replaced with a new carpet insert. A trained professional can assist here; [www.certifiedcleaners.org](http://www.certifiedcleaners.org).

**Wine** comes out with the very same dishwashing detergent solution found in the blood remedy. Blot, repeat, and dry. Call a professional if the stain persists.

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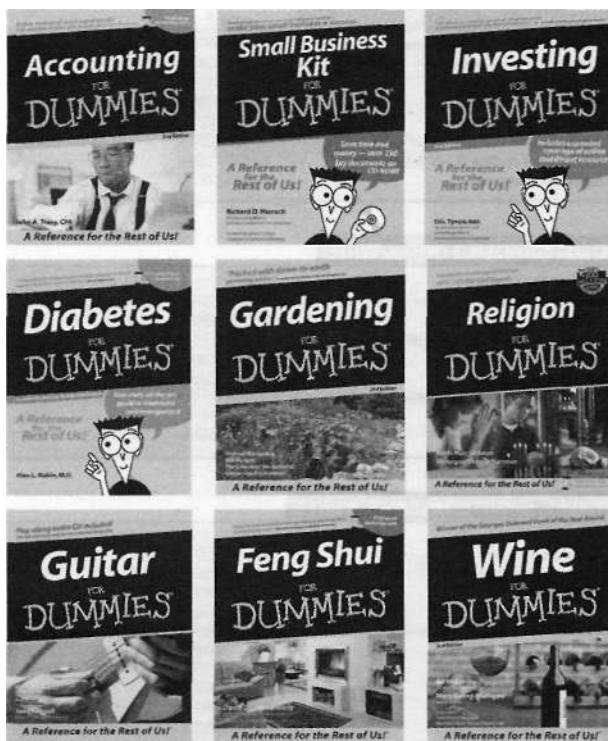
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