

ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM

Doing the laundry has a bigger impact on the planet than you might think. From toxins in dyes and synthetic fibers that make their way into our water systems and the air to the energy consumption and water waste caused by simply doing laundry, our choices are impacting the sustainability of our planet. Between 75-80% of the impact our clothing has on the environment comes from washing and drying because it takes so much energy to heat the wash water and run the dry cycle. Making a few changes in your laundry habits can help us move to a more sustainable future.

WASH SUSTAINABLY

- **Try to only do laundry when you have a full load.** One load of laundry uses approximately 40 gallons of water. If you don't have a full load, use the load size selector option (if you have one) to ensure that smaller loads use less water. Many clothing items can be worn more than once before they go in the laundry basket, except perhaps underwear and socks.
- **When doing laundry, make sure to use cold water.** Doing two loads of laundry weekly in cold water instead of hot or warm water can save up to 500 pounds of carbon dioxide each year (11 Ways to Green Your Laundry). More companies have adapted their detergents for cold-water washing leaving your whites white!
- **Choose the most sustainable laundry products.** There are many factors to consider. Look for products which tell you they are readily biodegradable, phosphate-free, and made from plant-based (not petroleum-based) ingredients.
 - **Concentrated laundry detergents** cost less to transport and have reduced packaging. Many come in ecologically-friendly packaging.
 - **Laundry detergent sheets** are paper-thin, dissolvable sheets that have all the necessary cleaning ingredients suspended in a biodegradable resin. These light weight sheets do the job of traditional liquid or powder detergent. Laundry detergent sheets use targeted ingredients in a concentrated, non-toxic format. They often have low-sudsing action to optimize your wash results by lifting stains and washing them away—not just covering them!
 - **Stay away from laundry pods and plastic jugs.** Pods are individually wrapped and come in plastic packaging, increasing the amount of plastic waste. Ideally, this should be recyclable, but it often isn't. There is growing concern about how truly biodegradable the coverings of pods are. The plastic jugs may say they are recyclable but most plastics are only down-cycled once or twice. Better to avoid this plastic in the first place.

DRY EFFICIENTLY

- **Line dry your clothes.** Skipping the dryer can reduce the carbon footprint of your clothing by as much as 33%. Dryers use more electricity than many appliances—only refrigerators use more. Even if you can't do it all the time, using a clothesline or drying rack can cut down on the amount of electricity you use.
- **Use vinegar as a fabric softener.** Replace commercial fabric softener with a cup of white vinegar added to the washer during the rinse cycle. Vinegar naturally balances the pH of soap, leaving your clothes soft and free of chemical residue.
- **Say NO! to dryer sheets,** which can be full of cancer-causing chemicals and neurotoxins such as toluene and styrene. They also break down organic fibers shortening the life of your fabrics. Instead, toss a sachet of dried organic lavender in the dryer for a healthy, sweet scent or use wool dryer balls.
- **Use wool dryer balls to replace fabric softener and dryer sheets.** As the balls bounce among the fabrics, they separate them, soften them, and speed up drying time. With shorter drying times for your clothes, you cut down on your power usage.
- **Make sure you clean the lint filter frequently** to increase efficiency and shorten the drying time.
- **Use the dryer's moisture sensor setting if it has one.** If the dryer has a moisture sensor, it will reduce the drying time or shut off the machine when it senses that clothes are dry, which reduces wear and tear on your clothing and saves lots of energy. A good moisture sensor is the best thing to look for if you're shopping for a new clothes dryer.

CAPTURE MICROFIBERS IN THE WASH

Microplastics from textiles are called microfibers because of their shape. The label of your clothing might have words like polyester, nylon, polyamide or acrylic. These are examples of plastic materials very commonly used in clothing. When these textiles are manufactured, washed with your laundry, worn or dried, they release these tiny plastic fibers in the water and the air. These microfibers have been found in almost everything we eat and drink: fish, seafood, chicken, tap water, bottled water, salt, beer and more. They are present throughout the entire food chain, of which we are at the top, so the risk for us is even higher ([Plastic Soup Foundation](#)).

Three popular ways to capture microplastics in laundry:

- **A microfiber filter** captures microplastics and attaches to your washing machine discharge hose. The filters need to be changed frequently.
- **Specially designed mesh bags** cause 86% fewer fibers of synthetic clothing to break when washed inside the bag due to their smooth design. The fibers that do break collect in the corners of the washing bag after washing and can be easily removed and disposed of.
- **Microplastic catchers** are easy-to-use laundry balls that catch microfibers that shed off your clothing in the washing machine. The ball's design was inspired by the way coral filters water in the ocean. All you have to do is toss the ball into your washing machine each time you wash your clothes, and the stalks of the ball will then catch those tiny microfibers floating in the water. An independent test found that these products can catch 26% of microfibers before they flow down the drain.

AVOID IRONING

Ironing consumes energy and can deteriorates fabric. Simply hang clothes up immediately after the wash cycle is complete. The water still in them will work with gravity to pull most wrinkles out. For wrinkle-prone clothing such as linen, cut the final spin cycle, which will leave even more water in the garments, creating yet more pull. Then fold dry clothes where you want creases to be, and place them under other clothes in your dresser, which will further help to press them.

To learn more:

- 11 Ways to Green Your Laundry ([Treehugger](#))
- The environmental impacts of laundry, and how to wash your clothing sustainably ([Tortoise & Lady Grey](#))

SELF ASSESSMENT

As a congregation we have committed to implement Laudato Si', which involves our individual and collective actions and choices. Please help us understand what practices you are already doing. Are there 1-2 choices you can make this year to make your life more sustainable?