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Consumer Information Service

A Consumer's Guide to Maintenance of Carpet & Natural Flooring

The Flooring Guild is dedicated to raising standards in the flooring industry through the delivery of high quality training and education. We believe Consumers should be given unbiased information to help make an informed choice and have produced a series of guides to help in that process.

The contents of each Guide are believed correct at the time of printing. Nevertheless, The Flooring Guild cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions or for changes in the details given in this Guide or for the consequences of any reliance on the information provided in the same.

Although every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, we will always welcome any information to assist in such efforts and to keep the Guides up to date.

We gratefully acknowledge the information given by various contributors including:

CDC Associates Ltd
The Alternative Flooring Company Ltd
The National Carpet Cleaners Association

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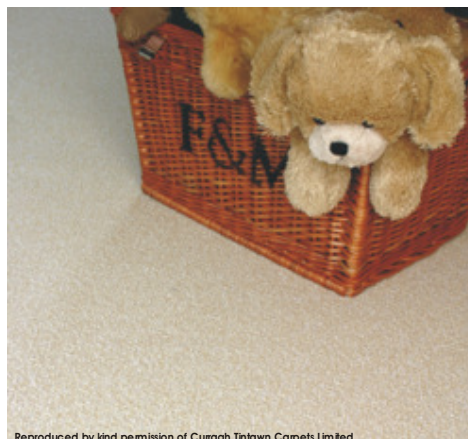


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MAINTENANCE OF CARPETS

Just as the clothes we wear need regular washing to keep them fresh and hygienic, so carpets require periodic cleaning.

A carpet's worst enemy is dirt. Not only will it make the carpet look shabby but accumulated soil and grit are major causes of reduced carpet life and enable destructive and health harmful mites and bacteria to work unchecked.

Cleaning costs are minimal when you consider the replacement cost of carpets, so regular cleaning makes economic sense too. Correct and effective maintenance will ensure that a carpet looks good much longer will also increase its effective life.

There are four types of maintenance:

- Preventative maintenance
- Routine maintenance
- Remedial maintenance
- Periodic maintenance

We will now look in greater detail at each one.

Preventative maintenance

For 'preventative maintenance' read barrier matting. Matting at an entrance or doorway can help reduce the amount of 'foot' dirt by between 80% and 85%. The reduction in dirt, soil and oil due to the mat means less maintenance, lower maintenance cost and an extended life to the carpet.

Routine maintenance

This will involve the use of a brush, carpet sweeper or vacuum cleaner and should start immediately the carpet is laid when it should be vacuumed to remove any loose fluff.

There is a myth that a new carpet should not be vacuumed. Not only is this nonsense but it can actually do untold damage and may shorten its life.

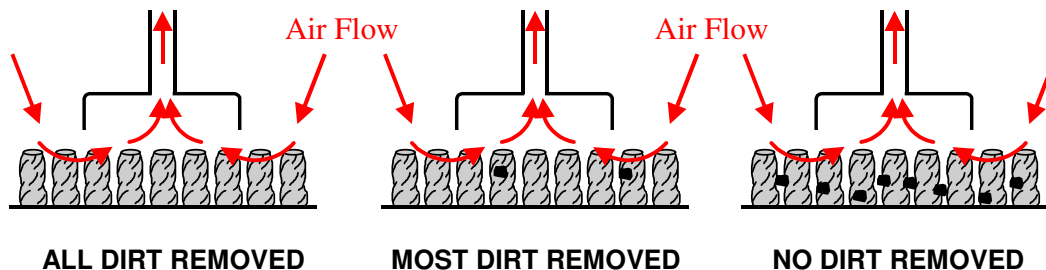
This myth is based on the principle that fluff created by loose pile fibres should not be removed but should be allowed to 'bed into the pile'.

In practice most of these loose fibres will be removed by the vacuum cleaner the first time it is used whether this operation takes place the day the carpet is laid or six months later!

If the vacuum is not used from the outset dirt and grit carried in on shoes will be deposited onto the carpet. Whilst it remains on the surface it can be removed by a good vacuum.

However, if that dirt and grit is left for a while, all foot traffic over the carpet will simply force it into the pile.

A vacuum cleaner does not draw any significant amount of air up through the backing of the carpet but merely draws it from around the surface of the pile as shown below.



Dirt will discolour the carpet and also encourage the tufts to matt together.

The carpet will compress with wear and will not recover. It will feel hard and uncomfortable. In addition this 'solid' surface will not absorb the impact of foot traffic so easily and this will result in premature wear.

Grit normally has very sharp edges and if allowed to sink to the base of the tuft it will act like a knife blade. When someone walks on the carpet the pile will be forced against the sharp edges and the tuft will be cut by it.

Quite clearly DAILY vacuuming (perhaps even more in a very busy area) will help a carpet to look good for much longer and will increase its life.

Correct daily maintenance will also decrease the need to shampoo the carpet as frequently as many people think is necessary.

Remedial Maintenance

Accidents will happen. If something gets spilled on your carpet, take prompt action to prevent staining. You will need some clean white absorbent cloth, or tissue, and the four basic solutions listed below.

Please check that your carpet is colourfast and safe to clean, by testing all solutions in an inconspicuous area on unused off-cut before application

REMEMBER - ACT QUICKLY

Scrape up solids and blot up liquids, taking plenty of time - it is worth the effort.

Mix the solution accurately and don't forget to test it on an inconspicuous part of the carpet or an unused off-cut before you start.

Always work from the outer edge of the stain to the centre. **NEVER OVER WET.**

Dab or blot rather than scrub, or rub hard.

Even though you may not completely remove the stain, the correct routine will give your professional cleaner, when called in, the best possible chance of success.

NOTE: Some new carpets have been subjected to anti-static and soil-resistant treatments. Even when these have been applied, it is wise to follow the stain removal procedures suggested.

1.	Dry Cleaning Solution	Surgical or White Spirit
2.	Detergent Solution	One teaspoonful of gentle detergent for washing woollens to half a pint (0.75 litres) of warm water.
3.	Detergent and Vinegar Solution	Add one tablespoonful of white (not malt) vinegar to the Detergent Solution.
4.	Ammonia Solution	One teaspoonful of branded household ammonia (available from hardware stores), to one cup of warm water.

Tackle stains as shown below:

Stain	Method
Alcohol	Blot up surplus spillage. Use Detergent Vinegar Solution. Work from the outer edge of the stain inwards, using a little at a time, blotting up with dry cloths frequently. See below for final rinse procedure.
Blood	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Chewing Gum	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Chocolate,	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Coffee	Blot up surplus spillage. Use Detergent Vinegar Solution. Work from the outer edge of the stain inwards, using a little at a time, blotting up with dry cloths frequently. See below for final rinse procedure.

Egg	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Fats	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Glue	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Ice Cream	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Liquid Foods	Blot up surplus spillage. Use Detergent Vinegar Solution. Work from the outer edge of the stain inwards, using a little at a time, blotting up with dry cloths frequently. See below for final rinse procedure.
Milk	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Oil	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Ointment	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Shoe Polish	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Soft Drinks	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Solids	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Sweets	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.

Tar	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a dry cleaning solution followed by Detergent and Vinegar. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Tea	Blot up surplus spillage. Use Detergent Vinegar Solution. Work from the outer edge of the stain inwards, using a little at a time, blotting up with dry cloths frequently. See below for final rinse procedure.
Unknown stains	Scrape up or blot surplus spillage. Use a dry cleaning solvent followed by clean lukewarm water. Blot dry. If further treatment is needed, use either Detergent or Detergent and Vinegar Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.
Urine	Blot up surplus spillage. Use Detergent Vinegar Solution. Work from the outer edge of the stain inwards, using a little at a time, blotting up with dry cloths frequently. See below for final rinse procedure.
Vomit	Scrape up excess with a blunt knife. Use a Detergent Solution starting at the outer edge. Blot dry. Follow up with Ammonia Solution. Blot dry. See below for final rinse procedure.

Final Rinse Procedure

This rinse procedure is applicable to all the above methods of stain removal.

Simply mix one-part white vinegar and four-parts water. Pour mixture into a spray bottle and spray over the stained area. Blot dampened area (do not rub) to remove excess moisture.

Spread white kitchen towel (stacked 6-8 sheets deep) over the affected area and place a weight, such as a book, directly on top. This will help moisture residue to soak into the towels. Leave overnight and repeat if necessary.

NO CARPET IS STAIN PROOF

In general hot liquids, bleaches and products containing natural dyes, especially those with yellow, orange or red colouring, can cause permanent discolouration.

PERIODIC MAINTENANCE**Shampoo Methods**

The need to shampoo a carpet is greatly decreased by daily vacuuming and the prompt treatment of stains.

However, shampooing is necessary to remove deep seated dirt and to 'rejuvenate' the appearance.

There are several cleaning methods, the choice depending on many factors, but mainly on the type of article, its construction, age and condition, degree of soiling, its location and the time available for the cleaning to be carried out.

The most common methods are shampooing, hot water extraction (often inaccurately referred to as steam cleaning) and the use of impregnated compounds, which are brushed into the carpet and subsequently removed with a powerful vacuum cleaner.

In each case the carpet must first be vacuumed thoroughly and then any stains treated separately before attempting to shampoo.

Irrespective of the type of system used, it is imperative that the carpet should not be over wetted.

This can lead to problems of shrinkage, discolouration and dye bleed.

Most proprietary shampoos involve a fair amount of water and great care should be taken in their application.

The dry powder systems necessitate a detergent impregnated granule being forced into the pile using a special applicator. The detergent dissolves the dirt and the granule re-absorbs it prior to being removed with a very powerful vacuum cleaner.

Wet cleaning systems apply a detergent solution to the carpet, and then rinse it away using a powerful suction cleaner, leaving the carpet relatively dry.

This is undoubtedly a very successful way to clean heavily soiled carpets.

MAINTENANCE OF NATURAL FLOORING**Stain Inhibitor**

It is recommended that all natural flooring is treated with a stain inhibitor to prevent spillage from seeping into the fibre of the product.

This acts as an invisible shield around all the fibres protecting them and making them easier to clean and care for.

However, it is important to note that such products only act as an inhibitor and not a proofer.

Cleaning Compound

Some manufacturers of natural flooring provide a cleaning compound, specifically designed for naturals, a spot removal kit and easy instructions.

It is important to make the cleaning of naturals as simple as possible because cleaning has always been a point of contention for consumers looking to purchase natural flooring.

First of all, it is important that the naturals have a stain inhibitor added to the flooring.

Naturals do not tend to be treated and therefore comparison with their synthetic competitors is difficult when comparing staining.

Secondly, always recommend that the consumer use a cleaning product specifically designed for naturals. They must not use water or any liquid products, such as Vanish, when treating stains on naturals.

Here are a few short rules when dealing with stains on naturals:

Speed Is Of The Essence - Never Let A Stain Set.

Never rub a stain, always blot with an absorbent towel until the surface is damp dry (rubbing will cause fibre distortion and will push the problem deeper into the flooring).

Use a paper kitchen towel, bath towel (white) or a baby's terry nappy. Do not add liquid to the area, simply blot dry.

Sprinkle a handful of dry cleaning compound on the stain and work this in over the area in several directions.

Leave the granules lightly packed on the stain until it is bone dry, if necessary, overnight, and then vacuum.

This should be with a suction vacuum rather than a beater head.

If the stain remains, repeat the preceding steps until stain disappears.

If the problem continues, use small amounts of the spot remover added to an absorbent towel and then blot the area.

Check to see if the spot is being removed by looking at the towel.

If you see the colour of the spot in the towel, it means that the spot remover is dissolving the spot.

Continue blotting with the towel and spot remover until there is no further colour transfer.

Then sprinkle more of the dry granules over the area, work in again, allow to dry and then vacuum.

Key points in cleaning natural flooring

- NEVER use water to clean naturals.
- If mould occurs on a product, use a little light bleach like Milton to kill the mould and eradicate it from that area. It is important in this case that the reason for the mould is eradicated too. If a room has high humidity, the carpets may become mouldy or even shrink.
- Regular vacuuming is recommended with a suction type cleaner (not an upright, as the beater bars will beat the pile flat over time.)
- To remove dirt or mud, wait until dry and brush with a stiff brush to loosen the mud (in the case of Seagrass always brush along the weave), then vacuum.

SUMMARY OF MAINTENANCE OPTIONS AND CLEANING SYSTEMS

Please note that no one method of maintenance or cleaning will deal with all soil and dirt conditions. The various methods, combined into a suitable maintenance scheme, will keep carpets looking good longer, giving a better return on your investment.

Plan	Systems		Comments
Preventive Maintenance	Barrier Mats	An essential part of carpet maintenance. A correctly placed mat at the main doorways can remove a large amount of soil which enters on shoes.	Matting needs to be maintained regularly. A heavily soiled mat will add to the problem of dirt being tracked into the home.
	Surface carpet protector	Protective treatment is applied to the carpet during manufacture or once fitted in the customer's home.	Protective finishes break down with time. Carpet can be cleaned and protective finish re-applied.
	Built-in carpet protector	This treatment is chemically built-in during the dyeing process and the protection is there for the life of the carpet.	This protective treatment does not mean that the carpet is 'stain proof'.
Routine Maintenance	Vacuum	A vacuum needs to have good suction power to clean carpets correctly. Daily vacuuming will keep a carpet looking good and stop the carpet wearing out.	Purchasing a good vacuum protects your investment.
Remedial Maintenance	Spots	Spots are concentrated substances lying near the carpet surface, which can usually be removed with a good quality spotter. With all spots - ACT IMMEDIATELY. Different spots respond to different cleaners, check manufacturer's recommendations.	Contain the spot into the smallest area. Blot with a white absorbent cloth to remove the liquid. Rinse with cool/cold water, do not soak the carpet. Repeat the blot/rinse regime until the spot is removed. If the above does not work, all in the professionals.
	Stain removal	Stains have penetrated the carpet fibres and are more difficult to remove and should be left to the professionals.	Various cleaning methods are available and brief details of those available are listed below.
Periodic Maintenance	Absorbent compound	Consists of an inert material impregnated with a (solvent) chemical. This is brushed into the pile and left until 'dry'.	No drying time. Allows for use of the carpet immediately it is cleaned.
	Dry foam shampoo	A cylindrical brush with shampoo or dry foam produced whether by mechanical action or from a cylinder. Suction cleaning follows when dry.	Has a drying time. May leave a sticky residue.
	Rotary brush	Cleaning chemicals are gravity fed as the carpet fibres are agitated. Soil is emulsified. Can be followed by a wet vacuum. Upon drying, a dry vacuum should be used.	Has a drying time. May leave a sticky residue.
	Hot water or cold water extraction	A jet of water containing chemicals is forced into the carpet under pressure. A suction unit removes loosened dirt. Brush systems are sometimes placed between the jet and the extractors to increase chemical agitation.	May lead to shrinkage if over wetted during operation.