

PROFESSIONAL SECRETS FOR WETCLEANING SILK BLOUSES (73)

The key to proper handling of silk requires knowledge of the fiber and the chemistry required for successful wetcleaning. Silk is a natural fiber obtained from the silk worm and the term "Only silk is silk" emphasizes its uniqueness. Silk can be dyed in manufacture numerous ways. The fastness of the dye is determined by the method of dyeing and the quality controls used in manufacture. A dye that is not properly set into the fabric is known to be fugitive. This means that the dye would bleed and run when contacted by water. Poor dyes on silks can not be totally set or prevented from bleeding when wetcleaning. You can inhibit or lessen the chance of dye bleeding but you can not totally set the dye. Silk is very sensitive to staining from contact with chloride salts. Chloride salts are found in perspiration, deodorants, many foods and beverages. This is why it is important to remove staining from silk as soon as possible. Silk is also sensitive to alcohol which can cause discoloration. The rays of the sunlight easily discolor silks so garments that are wetcleaned are never hung outside to dry. When wetcleaning do not use alkali or ammonia which can close silk to bleed. Color safe bleaches should not be used since they contain sodium perborate or sodium percarbonate which are alkaline in nature. Household bleach or sodium hypochlorate should also never be used. Acids tend to inhibit dye bleeding. This is why detergents sold to professional drycleaners for wetcleaning silks are slightly acid in nature.

TESTING

To test a dye on a silk for dye fastness place a portion of the fabric on a white clean towel. Then dab the surface of the fabric with a towel damp with water and detergent. Examine the towels for any dye transfer which indicates a fugitive or poor dye. You should limit your wetcleaning to silk blouses. Do not wetclean silk suits or jackets where lining and accessories might be a problem.

PREPARATION FOR WETCLEANING

- (1) **Vinegar-White distilled vinegar is 5% acetic acid. You do not have to buy a name brand. Many of the supermarkets have their own brand of vinegar for less money than the name brand.**
- (2) **Neutral based detergent-Use a mild detergent such as Tide. Do not use one with color safe bleach.**
- (3) **Liquid fabric softener such as Snuggle.**

PROCEDURE

Fill washing machine on a small load setting. Add detergent and vinegar to the water. You must add at least 3 cups of vinegar to obtain an acid condition of the

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water. Do not add fabric softener to the water at this time. Most household detergents contain anionic surfactants which could be neutralized by the cationic nature of the softening agent. Mix the concentration by agitating the washing machine. Then add the silks and wetclean on a gentle cycle. At the end of the cleaning cycle prepare the garments for a final rinse. Do not pour fabric softener on top of the fabrics. After washing remove garments and fill washing machine with a low level of water. Add and mix in the fabric softener. Run the silk fabrics on the final rinse.

DRYING

The drying cycle is very important for obtaining a properly wetcleaned silk. Do not hang silks up to dry since they will be stiff, boardy and wrinkled when dry. Place silks in the dryer on a warm cycle and tumble a few minutes with heat and then on a cool cycle. The object in the drying cycle is to dry the fabrics so they are 90% dry. This is the preferred drying that obtains the best results on silk. 90% dry means that only the seams of the garment are slightly damp. It may take a little experimentation to obtain this result but it is worth the time trying. The silk fabric after drying should be soft with less wrinkling than if it were hung to dry. The silk is now ready for ironing.