

## When and How to Use Fabric Softener in Your Laundry

When most of us think about fabric softener, we picture a big bottle of liquid that adds fragrance to our laundry, softens clothes, and reduces static. The lubricating chemicals in fabric softeners coat fabrics to make them feel softer. Static electricity that forms in an automatic dryer from too many loose electrons gives clothing atoms a negative charge. Fabric softeners contain cationic, or positively charged ions, and equalize the electrons and ions to prevent static.

Fabric softeners can be liquid, sheets to use in the dryer, or reusable dryer balls.

### FEATURED VIDEO

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### How to Make Your Own Dryer Sheets

- **Liquid fabric softener or fabric conditioner** is added to your washer during the rinse cycle. By adding the fabric softener during the rinse cycle, the product is left in the fabric to saturate and coat the wet fibers. The liquid can be scented or unscented. Fabric conditioners contain softening ingredients and chemicals that help prevent fading, stretching, and pilling.
- **Most [dryer sheets](#)**, made of non-woven synthetic fabric, are coated with a solution of quaternary ammonium salt or silicone oil-based fabric softener (scented or unscented). Dryer heat melts the fabric softener allowing the coating to transfer to fabrics to make them feel softer to the touch.
- **Dryer balls** can be made from natural fibers ([wool dryer balls](#)) or synthetic materials. They do not leave any type of chemical coating on fabrics to make them feel softer but do reduce static by equalizing electrons and ions. Plastic dryer balls also work by repeatedly hitting the fabric as it tumbles in the dryer, reducing fabric stiffness and removing lint.

### Before You Use Fabric Softener

Before using liquid fabric softener or dryer sheets, take time to check the [care label](#) of the clothing, as fabric softeners can alter the performance of some fabrics. The lubricants in fabric softeners and dryer sheets leave a film on fabric that can affect fire resistance, breathability, and moisture-wicking factors.

### WARNING

Do not use liquid fabric softener or dryer sheets on the following fabrics. Choose natural fiber wool dryer balls instead to reduce static.

- Flame-resistant clothing, especially children's pajamas: reduces self-extinguishing capacity
- Water-repellent fabrics: reduces performance
- Microfiber cleaning towels: the polyester and nylon of microfiber actually bonds to the oils and conditioners in the softener, making the loss in absorbency cumulative over time.
- Athletic wear: reduces moisture-wicking performance
- Microfiber fleece and compression garments: reduces breathability

# What You'll Need

## Equipment / Tools

- Washer
- Automatic dryer
- Wool dryer balls
- Synthetic dryer balls

## Materials

- Liquid fabric softener
- Dryer sheets

## Instructions

Materials and tools to use fabric softener for laundry

The Spruce / Ana Cadena

How to Use Liquid Fabric Softener

Fill the Fabric Softener Dispenser

Most washers have a fabric softener dispenser that can be filled for single or multiple loads. Add the liquid softener to the dispenser before you select laundry cycles, load size, and water temperature. Your washer guide will have instructions for your model. If you have lost the guide, check the manufacturer's website for instructions.

Liquid fabric softener poured into washing machine dispenser

Add Manually to the Final Rinse Cycle

If your washer does not have a dispenser, add the fabric softener when the washer drum is full of water for the rinse cycle.

## Fabric softener poured into bottle cap

### Use a Fabric Softener Dispenser Ball

If you can't remember to add the fabric softener during the rinse cycle, there are plastic balls that dispense fabric softener automatically. The ball is filled with the appropriate amount of fabric softener liquid and added with the dirty laundry.

When the washer begins to spin at the end of the wash cycle, the ball opens and the fabric softener is added to the wet clothes as the rinse cycle begins.

## WARNING

While the dispenser balls are convenient, they may cause fabric softener stains on clothing if the washer does not contain enough water for even dispersion.

### **Blue fabric softener dispenser ball held in front of open washing machine**

#### **How to Use Dryer Sheets**

Load Wet Laundry into the Dryer

Give each wet piece of laundry a shake to help reduce wrinkles and place them in the dryer. Do not overload the dryer. The clothes and dryer sheet need room to move freely.

Wet shirt held up in dryer machine drum

#### **Add the Dryer Sheet**

Place the dryer sheet on top of the load of laundry. Adding it last helps it circulate freely in the dryer without getting trapped between garments.

Dryer sheet placed on top of wet laundry pile in dryer

#### **Remove the Dryer Sheet**

When the cycle is complete, remove the dryer sheet. Leaving too many dryer sheets in the drum can cause them to become stuck in the lint filter or block an air vent. Dispose of the sheet properly.

Used dryer sheet pulled out of dryer

#### **How to Use Dryer Balls**

Load the Dryer with Wet Laundry

Load the dryer with the freshly washed laundry.

Wet and clean laundry loaded inside drying machine

#### **Add the Dryer Balls**

Add the natural wool or plastic dryer balls to the drum on top of the wet laundry. Use two or three balls to help absorb the most static. Remove the balls at the end of the cycle to be used again.

Wool dryer balls added on top of laundry pile in dryer

#### **Tips for Using Fabric Softeners**

Clean your washer regularly after using use in-wash fabric softeners. The same lubricants that coat the fabrics also coat the drum of your washer and trap soil and odors.

Clean your dryer at least four times per year if you use dryer sheets to prevent residue from redepositing on fabrics.

Why Does My Front Load Washer Smell Bad?