

PORCELAIN SINK CARE



HOW TO CARE FOR PORCELAIN FIXTURES

TIPS & TRICKS TO HELP MAINTAIN THE BEAUTY OF VITREOUS CHINA, FIRECLAY, AND PORCELAIN ENAMELED FIXTURES

Few items in a home match the beauty of a porcelain fixture. Beauty, however, can be fragile, and caring for your porcelain fixtures can prove challenging. Soap scum, stains, scuffs and scratches all work to mar porcelain's inherent grace. So how does one guard against the ravages of time (and chemistry)?

"Porcelain" can refer to a 100% porcelain fixture ("vitreous china"), or also to porcelain enamel, which is used to coat a steel or cast-iron fixture. Pure porcelain is most often found in bathroom sinks and toilets, while tubs and kitchen sinks are often cast-iron or steel with a porcelain enamel finish. In addition, there are many terms used to describe white "clay" fixtures - sometimes the terms are interchangeable and sometimes they are not.

For example, vitreous china and porcelain mean essentially the same thing. Vitreous china/porcelain sinks are made by baking a refined mixture of clay and other minerals at a high temperature after glazing. Vitreous china/porcelain is naturally mildew- and bacteria-resistant with a non-porous surface that is ideal for maintaining sanitation - hence its common use in lavatory sinks and toilets. Fireclay, on the other hand, is also molded from a clay and mineral mixture, but it is fired at a higher temperature than vitreous china/porcelain which gives it greater resistance to heat - making it ideal for use in kitchen sinks. Ceramic is sometimes used interchangeably with fireclay, vitreous china, or porcelain, and simply refers to a style of fixture that is molded from clay and baked.

Vitreous china, fireclay, and porcelain enamel (though generally all cleaned using the same methods) require a high degree of caution in cleaning, as the finish can be etched by acids or scratched by harsh abrasives. When this happens, the glossy porcelain look can become dull or discolored. Dirt and deposits find their way into the etched surface, becoming more difficult to remove. Thus begins a vicious circle in which these deeper-set stains can only be removed with abrasive substances, which in turn cause more etching and scratching, creating more and deeper stains. Don't despair yet though, we're here to help you break the cycle and learn how to properly care for your porcelain to help keep it looking its best throughout the years.

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KEEPING YOUR PORCELAIN CLEAN & SHINY FROM THE START...

As it is in so many other areas of life, prevention is key when it comes to cleaning and maintaining your porcelain fixtures. Though it may be inconvenient or easy to forget, try to get into the habit of wiping down your sink or tub after each use. Calcium and other minerals found in water not only produce the dreaded limescale on your shower doors, but also trap dirt and soap scum in your tub. Once this dries and solidifies on your tub or sink, it becomes harder to remove and turns your finish from beautiful to dingy.

Regular cleanings with dish soap and water using a non-abrasive sponge can forestall deeper, more involved cleanings. You might also consider finishing off a cleaning with lemon oil - in addition to restoring a glimmering sheen to your fixture, this will create a protective barrier that keeps stains from setting in. Gel Gloss will also provide a protective finish, in addition to providing an effective, non-abrasive cleaning option that can sometimes help get rid of stains.

If you're looking for a natural alternative, both vinegar and lemon juice are very popular natural cleaners, particularly in the kitchen. This is due to their acidity, which is mild enough that it shouldn't harm your fixture, but still acidic enough to warrant caution. While you don't necessarily need to dilute either substance for your cleaning purposes, you should most certainly rinse the tub/sink after using these products - and don't forget to dry!

To help reduce the risk of staining, avoid leaving things like coffee grounds, tea bags, or similar substances in the sink overnight, as this can discolor your sink. Also, avoid spilling nail polish, hair dyes, clothing dyes, or similar substances on your ceramic sink. Although vitreous china, fireclay, and porcelain enamel are non-porous, they do tend to "absorb" color from strong substances which can be almost impossible to remove. Lay down a piece of plastic or other covering while polishing nails, remember to keep the water continuously running while rinsing dyes, and use a bucket or other type of basin instead of your sink for dyeing fabrics.

To prevent annoying grey scuffs and scratches from pots, pans, and even jewelry, consider using a soft mat or a sink grid with rubber feet in the bottom of your sink. Not only will this protect your sink, it will also provide an additional safeguard against broken dishes! Remove the mat/grid when not in use to avoid any potential marking or staining from water and other substances. Should your sink already have such marks, worry not. A product called Naval Jelly (active ingredient: phosphoric acid) is excellent for removing rust from metals, and works just as well at removing these metal stains from your porcelain. Being an acid, be sure not to leave the jelly on too long, and rinse thoroughly.

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All of this should help to protect your porcelain from getting stained, dulled, or scratched. Now we know some of you are saying - "But what about such and such product? My mother/grandmother/sister/best friend's neighbor's cousin's aunt used this and it worked!" - and it may have. Or it may have not noticeably damaged the finish until months later. However, to keep your porcelain looking its best, **remember the #1 rule of porcelain care - if you wouldn't use it to clean your mirror, don't use it to clean your porcelain!**

STAIN REMOVAL FOR NEW OR WELL CARED FOR PORCELAIN

Sometimes even with new or well maintained porcelain, you'll get stains from someone leaving a can of shaving cream on the side of tub, or if you have lots of iron in your water, or whatever. As mentioned above, Naval Jelly is great for removing metal scratches and rust stains on porcelain. Alternatively, lemon juice or vinegar works well at removing rust stains on porcelain/enameled fixtures. Try squeezing lemon juice or vinegar over the stain and let it sit for a while. Though weaker, citric and acetic acids are still acids, and prolonged exposure increases the risk of etching the finish, resulting in worse, more frequent stains and more difficult cleaning. Do not leave it sitting for too long, and do not scrub with anything rough. Rinse thoroughly with water.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PORCELAIN IS ALREADY DULL OR SCRATCHED...

If you don't have brand new fixtures - say you're moving into a rental unit or a previously owned home - or if your porcelain has not previously been well maintained, using the gentler methods mentioned above simply may not work. If replacing the fixture is not desired or not an option, we're sorry to say there's pretty much nothing you can do to get the shine back. However, there are ways to at least make sure your porcelain is clean and sanitary and get it looking the best it can.

We recommend starting with the most gentle option available and working your way up to heavier-duty cleaning as it is needed. Before moving onto the heavier-duty cleaning though, take time to test whatever cleaning product you decide to use on an inconspicuous spot: you never know what might actually end up harming your finish, especially with colored porcelain. Also take care to avoid faucets and drains if the products you're using have not been explicitly recommended for them. Just because something is safe for the tub's finish does not mean it's safe for the faucet's.

Bleach, among the most revered of cleaning products and one that most people have readily accessible, can wreak havoc on your enameled fixture. While

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generally safe with straight porcelain and fireclay, chlorine bleach can oxidize the iron of an enameled fixture to create terrible rust stains. With colored porcelain enamel, the effect can be even worse: in addition to rust, the color will fade. As a general rule, do not use regular chlorine bleach on a porcelain-enameled fixture. When used on straight porcelain or fireclay, follow the dilution directions on the bottle, don't let it sit for too long, and be sure to rinse well and dry after cleaning. As always, never mix cleaners, and be extra-cautious with bleach (especially if you've used ammonia-based cleaners previously). If your home has a septic system instead of municipal sewage, steer clear of bleach as it can quickly destroy the natural waste-disposing ecosystem of your septic.

Ammonia, another powerful cleaner found in common cleaners like Windex, can be used to cut grease and soap scum. However, ammonia can be particularly hazardous, as it reacts with chlorine bleach to create a toxic gas. Never use ammonia in conjunction with bleach, nor on any surfaces that may have come into contact with bleach-containing products without thoroughly rinsing them first. Remember - never mix any cleaning products unless your mixtures have been recommended by the manufacturer.

As with any other cleaning product, be sure the room is well-ventilated. Start with a dilution of 1 tablespoon of standard household ammonia in 1 gallon of water, and increase the concentration by a tablespoon only if necessary. Rinse and wipe down.

STAIN REMOVAL FOR DAMAGED PORCELAIN

For those who made the mistake of using chlorine bleach on their porcelain-enameled fixture, dumped a can of Comet in the sink, or let their chemical cleaner sit for way too long, and now have what looks like a crime scene to deal with, worry not! There are a number of different options to help control the damage.

Simple, humble hydrogen peroxide - the very one found in the brown bottle in your medicine cabinet - can make it seem like those horrible accidents never happened. Hydrogen peroxide is an oxygen-based bleach, which reduces rather than oxidizes the iron found in your fixture. While some commercial cleaners have an oxygen-bleach base, standard hydrogen peroxide should work just as effectively, even at over-the-counter concentrations. Spray or pour it on your stained surface, and watch the magic of chemistry unfold. You can also soak paper towels or rags on an especially stained spot, and let sit. Wipe with a non-abrasive sponge or towel, and rinse/dry thoroughly. Although oxygen-based bleach is sometimes available in powdered form (like OxiClean), we strongly recommend using only liquid versions. Unless the powder is fully dissolved, there's the potential for scratching.

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Another option is oxalic acid. Oxalic acid is an active ingredient in popular cleaners like Barkeeper's Friend. Stronger than both acetic and citric acid, it should only be used sparingly when these weaker acids aren't up to the task of cutting through your stains and deposits. The potential for etching your finish is much greater, and regular use can cause discoloration. We recommend using a liquid version if possible, as the powdered form can potentially scratch your porcelain in addition to the etching that could be caused by the acid.

WHAT TO USE AS AN ABSOLUTE LAST RESORT WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS...

Though popular for being gentler alternatives to harsh chemical cleaners, baking soda, Borax, and even salt can harm the finish of your porcelain fixtures. As gentle as they are, these compounds are still abrasive and will scratch your finish, especially with regular use. It is strongly recommended you not use them unless you absolutely have to.

Needless to say, commercial abrasives ("scouring powders") - like Ajax, Bon Ami, Comet and Zud - should be avoided. The scratches created by these abrasives trap grease, soap scum and water deposits. This not only discolors your fixture over time, it also makes future cleaning ever more difficult. Always keep in mind that your porcelain finish is basically glass fused to your sink or tub. Imagine cleaning your windows or mirrors with Comet. It's not something that turns out well! However, we live in the real world and we understand that if someone has already used a scouring powder on your porcelain, this may be the only way to get that fixture clean again.

Pumice stones are another simple, popular cleaning tool, as are steel wool pads. Unfortunately, it is generally unwise to use pumice or steel wool on porcelain fixtures: while it may get rid of stains, it will also scratch the finish. This creates areas for stains and bacteria to adhere directly to the porcelain. Once this happens, it's unlikely you will ever have a clean-looking fixture again.

WHICH COMMON CLEANERS ARE SAFE FOR PORCELAIN?

Safe When Properly Used

- Citric acid
- Dishwashing liquid
- Gel Gloss
- Lemon juice
- Naval Jelly
- Vinegar
- Windex

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Use Only On Damaged Surfaces

- Ammonia
- Bleach
- Barkeeper's Friend
- Hydrogen peroxide

NOT Recommended

- Ajax
- Baking soda
- Borax
- Comet
- Magic Eraser
- OxiClean (powder)
- Pumice stone
- Scouring powders
- Soft Scrub
- Steel wool