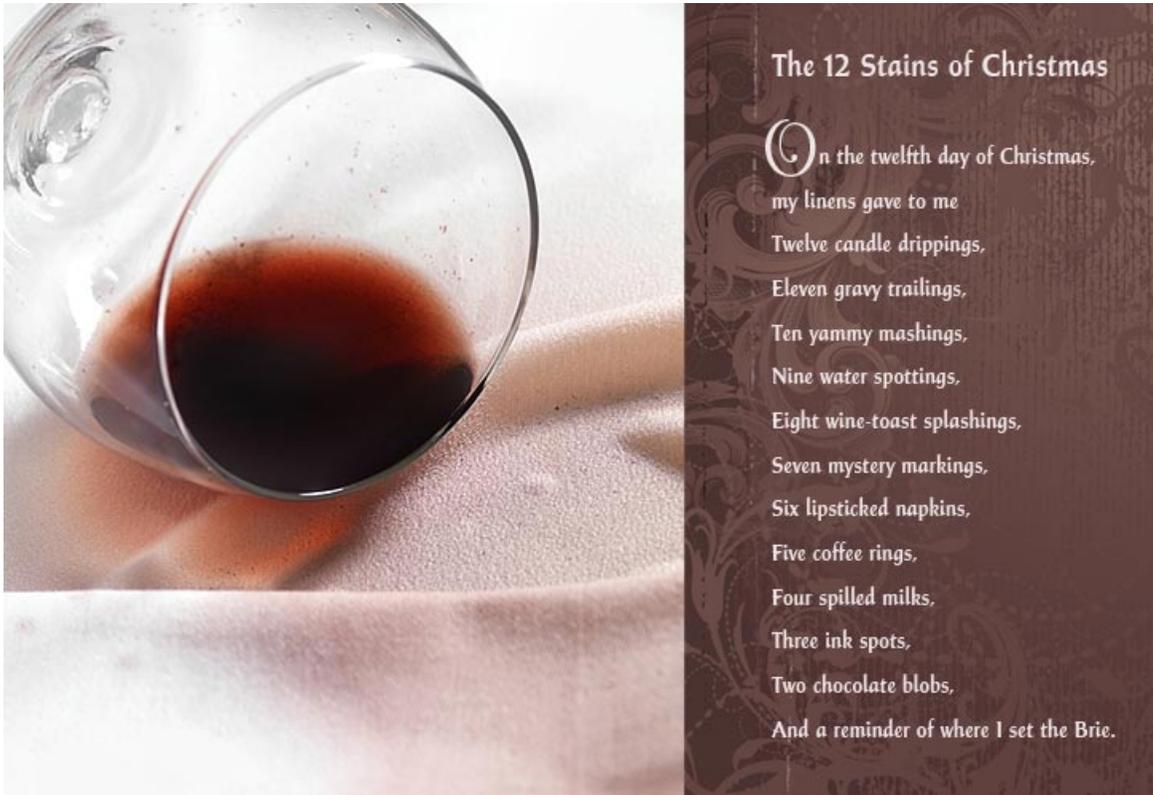


Fabric Stains: Preventing and Treating

Editor: Alicia Thommas.Designer.Sew4Home

Thursday, 07 January 2010 9:00



A white tablecloth floats silently onto the antique rosewood dining table like a wintery blanket of freshly fallen snow. Topped with sparkling china, spotless crystal and polished sterling, it becomes the pristine foundation for a magnificent holiday feast. And then... the doorbell rings. Hello, stains!

Restrain the Stain

Stains are inevitable, especially after holiday dining. That said, there are a few things you can do in the future to foil devilish stains from permeating your lovely linens.

1. Decorative charger plates can legally be left on the table until the dessert course. They protect your tablecloth from dinner plate overflows, soup spills, and other dining disasters.
2. Use a plate under gravy boats; and servers for salad dressing, jam, cream and syrup.
3. Wrap your wine bottle with a white cloth napkin, restaurant style. No drips; plus it kicks your presentation up a notch.
4. Placemats. A placemat on an elegant tablecloth is a second layer of defense. Same with a table runner.
5. Keep a stain buster emergency kit on hand: white towels, absorbers like cornstarch for grease, enzyme cleaners, oxygen bleach, hydrogen peroxide, lemon juice, white vinegar, denatured alcohol, and club soda; plus whatever other cleaning agents suit your household.
6. And, while they help, Scotchgard Protector and similar fabric protectors often contain sketchy sounding chemicals, like *perfluorobutanesulfonic acid* (PFBS). Personally, I prefer gravy.

Dry Clean Only Fabrics

If the results matter, don't attempt to self-treat the stain. Instead, gently remove the giant blob of whatever from your great-grandmother's hand-embroidered tablecloth, and be the first person at your dry cleaner's door the following day. If you can identify the fiber content (silk, linen, etc.) and the type of stain, your dry cleaner will give you a gold star. However, unless he

has a magic wand, some stains are destined to become everlasting memories of the meal. One day, decades from now, they'll make you smile ... if you have any sense of humor at all.

Washable Fabrics

There are numerous websites that deal with the specifics of stain removal (*see Handy Links* below), like what to do when your elegant handmade napkins become the blotter for Uncle Frank's buttery knife. While it's tempting to send him to the kiddie table; don't. Make a mental note that it's just butter. It's just butter. It's just butter. Then, breath deeply in preparation for Uncle Frank's legendary dinner roll juggling act.

Basics for Washables

Rule number 1: Act quickly.

1. Blot liquids with white paper towels or a clean white cloth. Put another cloth behind the stained area to help soak up the stain.
2. Use a clean spoon or dinner knife to gently lift off solids.
3. Use cool or warm water. Hot water may set stains; especially protein stains like milk and eggs... or blood. Hope the holiday meal goes better next year if blood is your problem.
4. Pre-test stain removal agents on a hidden area or inside seam. See if it damages the fiber, alters the color or changes the appearance of the finish. Sometimes the solution is worse than the problem.
5. Wash soiled items separately to avoid stain transfer. An overloaded washer reduces cleaning effectiveness and may damage the machine. All you need during during stain triage, is washer failure.
6. After washing, check your wet fabric for signs of the stain. Sometimes stains remain incognito until dry. It's best to bypass the dryer and let your item dry on a drying rack.
7. If you still see stains. Try cleaning again. And again. Sometimes it takes several tries.
8. Never iron or press over a stain (unless you've given up). A hot iron is a stain's best friend.
9. Even washable items may need the attention of a professional dry cleaner. Washing is a gamble. If the stain doesn't come out, your dry cleaner's first-responder advantage is lost. If the item is precious, consult your dry cleaner.
10. Check one of the handy links below for instructions on treating your specific fabric and stain.

Handy Links

- [Fabric Link Stain Guide for Washable Fabrics](#)
- [Martha Stewart: how to get it out](#)
- [Pioneer Thinking Stain Remover Guide](#)

When the Stain Wins

Some stains persevere though all of your efforts. But, don't be too quick to toss your linens.

1. If the stain is not overwhelming, maybe you can place something decorative over it like a table runner, candle or vase.
2. A large tablecloth can be cut down to fit a smaller table, or made into other stainable items like napkins and placemats.
3. Appliqué. Depending on the location, sometimes artful appliqué hides the evidence. If done cleverly, it may offer a reasonable solution. I washed and dried a new apron with a wrapped chocolate in the pocket and didn't notice until I pulled it from the dryer. That chocolate stain was permanent. I appliquéd a fussy cut section of Amy Butler fabric onto the pocket to thunderous applause. Apparently, I'd upscaled it! Will that work on a tablecloth? This may be your year to find out.
4. Table linens are often made from elegant fabrics that can be rescued and reused in future sewing projects ... which we happily provide here at Sew4Home.

Happy stain removing.

[Fabric, Color & Texture](#)

This project and patterns (if any) may be downloaded for personal use only. No electronic or printed reproduction permitted without the prior written consent of Sew4Home LLC.

Copyright 2009-2019 Sew4Home LLC. All Rights Reserved.

