

MAKE THINGS LAST

How to get more years, and value, out of the products you own. Here's some money- and product-savings advice from CONSUMER REPORTS® colleagues and industry sources

Air Conditioners

Have central units professionally serviced, and clean or replace their filters monthly or as needed. For window units, wash the filter periodically in warm, soapy water and let it dry completely before reinstalling.

Carpeting and rugs

Vacuum carpets often, especially in high-traffic areas. Consider a professional cleaning every 12-18 months. (But check your carpet warranty first, if it has one. Washing too often might damage the fibers and void your coverage.) Install pads unless your carpet came with it attached. Also use pads under small rugs and rotate them periodically to help even wear.

CD's and DVD's

Wipe discs with a soft, lint-free cloth from the center to the outer edge, as if you were slicing a pie.

Cell Phones

Don't leave a mobile phone in your car's glove compartment during the summer or the batteries might overheat, possibly ruining the phone. Also check your phone's instructions to see if the manufacturer warns about overcharging, a problem with some models. If you've been known to drop your phone, a protective case might be a worthy investment.

Clothes Dryer

Clean the lint filter after each use and the entire air duct at least once a year.

Clothes Washer

Don't overload your machine. To avoid mold in front-loaders, clean the rubber door gasket periodically with a bleach solution, and keep the door ajar after each use to air out washer.

Computers

Make sure you have antivirus software and that it's up-to-date. Use your laptop on a hard surface rather than a soft one, such as a bed or carpet, which can block air flow and lead to overheating. Always shut down your computer before moving it.

Digital cameras

When necessary, clean the lens gently with a microfiber lens cloth and lens-cleaning fluid. Use the camera's strap to keep from dropping it.

Dishwashers

Check the filter regularly to remove any debris.

Flat-panel TV's

Consult the manual for cleaning instructions, which usually tell you to avoid commercial cleaners containing alcohol or ammonia. Wipe the screen gently with a soft, slightly damp cloth, ideally a microfiber one. Make sure that any air vents are unblocked and that the set is either on a sturdy piece of furniture where it can't tip over or securely mounted to a wall.

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Hardwood flooring

Dry mop, sweep with a soft-bristle broom, or vacuum with a bare-flow attachment (not a regular rotary brush). Wipe up wet spills ASAP. Consider rugs to protect high-traffic areas.

Kitchen knives

Store them in a wooden block or individual plastic shields, and wash them by hand.

Lawn Mowers

Have the blade sharpened and balanced at least once each mowing season, and hose or scrape clippings off the "deck" (or underside) of the mower after each use. Before storing your mower for the winter, add stabilizer to the gas tank, then run the engine briefly to protect the fuel system. If you have a cordless electric model check the manufacturer's instructions for maintaining the battery. You might need to keep it charged year-round to prolong its life.

Mattresses

Rotate them front to back periodically; most new models have extra padding only on one side and shouldn't be flipped. Avoid sitting on the edge because it could eventually cause sagging. Buy a washable protective cover. Pull back the sheets and blankets to let the bed air out for 20 minutes or so each morning.

Ranges

On gas models, inspect the burners regularly and clean the burner ports carefully with a needle. But don't touch the igniter, which could be damaged.

Refrigerators

Wipe door gaskets with water and mild detergent. Vacuum or brush the dust off the condenser coil, usually under the unit, at least once a year.

Tires

Check your owners manual or sticker, often on the door jamb, fuel-filler door, or in the glove box, for guidance on keeping them properly inflated. Don't go by the numbers on the side of the tire; that refers to its maximum pressure. Underinflated tires reduce your gas mileage, compromise handling, and wear out faster.

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