Center for Earth Leadership

eco tips

Cold Water Washing

Why we care

Heating water accounts for about one-quarter of a household's energy use, and much of that water is used for laundry. Switching your washing machine temperature setting from hot to warm can cut a load's energy use in half, and using the cold/cold cycle instead of the hot/warm one can save energy equivalent to driving a car nine miles. Aside from saving money, cold-water washes help fabrics retain their color and strength and are better for removal of some stains.

Simple, positive change

- Wash and rinse laundry with cold water. Warm or hot water washes may be needed for heavily soiled and grease-stained clothes, or to kill dust mites and bacteria. Keep in mind a hot dryer can serve the same latter purpose.
- Enhance cold-water washing by pre-treating grease stains with liquid detergent, pre-soaking, or setting longer wash times.
- Use a plant-based detergent such as Biokleen, Ecover, or Seventh Generation as they are less harmful to the environment. Seventh Generation Natural Powdered HE received a "recommended" rating from *Consumer Reports*.
- If you have hard water, use a laundry booster like Borax to increase your detergent's effectiveness.
- Reduce the number of loads you do. Refrain from washing clothes that aren't dirty.
- When buying a new machine, consider an Energy Star front loader. The tumbling action requires less water and uses about one-third the energy of a top loader. Choose a model that has faster spin speeds reducing the time and energy needed for drying.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.