I'm not a robot

Let’s face it: The laundry tag on your clothes or linens can often look more like a collection of cryptic hieroglyphics than a clear set of instructions. That’s why we put together this handy laundry symbol cheat sheet—to help you quickly decode the most common care symbols with ease. For extra convenience, print it out and hang it in your laundry room, or save it to your phone for on-the-go reference. You might even find yourself pulling it up while shopping, just to double-check whether that trendy boyfriend blazer is secretly dry-clean only. The first thing you need to know is what each of the general symbols means. The icon that looks like a bucket of water describes how to wash the piece.The square with a circle in the center refers to drying.The iron instructs you on how to—well—iron. The remaining laundry tag symbols refer to bleaching (triangle), dry-cleaning (circle), and non-machine drying (square) requirements. Each of the above-mentioned laundry symbols has specifications within them: One dot on the icon means to perform that function on a cold or low cycle, two dots mean warm or medium, and three dots mean hot or high. Credit: RealSimple.com Save our laundry symbol cheat sheet printable. All the symbols that depict a bucket with waves indicate various washing methods you can use on that fabric. Here's the deets on what each one means: The dots indicate the temperature you should choose when you machine wash the item. It's one dot for cold, two dots for medium/warm, and three dots for hot. As you might expect, a hand symbol means you need to hand wash the garment. You can't wash this item. (There's likely a dry-cleaning symbol in the mix then.) These washing symbols indicate specialized wash settings. One line means permanent press setting, while two lines means gentle or delicate settings. The square symbols give you the details on how to dry your laundry. Again, there are an array of little codes that'll give you insight into how to Step away from the clothes dryer if you see these symbols! If it's a flat, horizontal line, dry the item flat. If it's a curved line, you can line dry. The main circle indicates that you can use your clothes dryer to dry your clothes. Dots give you a sense of the temperature to use: one dot for cool, two dots for medium temperature, three dots for high temperature. If the circle is solid with an empty square around it, it means no heat on the dryer. You'll sometimes see lines below the clothes drying symbol. A single line indicates using the permanent press cycle, while double lines indicate the delicate or gentle cycle. That cute little iron-shaped symbol gives you a sense of how (and whether) you can iron your clothing. The iron symbol with dots means that it can definitely be ironed, but you need to stick with their temperature recommendations. Again, one dot is low, two dots mean medium, and three dots is high. As you can imagine, the X means no—but for the ironing symbols, its placement matters. If the X is over the iron proper, it means the item can't be ironed. If it's below the iron, it means not to use steam. You may encounter a few additional laundry symbols you'll need to decipher, to help you learn about dry cleaning, bleaching, and other laundry needs. The triangle gives you information about whether you can use bleach on it. A triangle means you can bleach it, a triangle with an X through it means you cannot bleach it, and a triangle with several angled stripes within it tells you to use non-chlorine bleach. The circle without a square around it is all about dry cleaning. A circle means it can be dry cleaned, the circle with an X through it means no dry cleaning allowed. You might see a bowtie-shaped symbol with a big X through it. That indicates that you shouldn't wring out the clothes, or you might risk damaging them. If decoding symbols wasn't enough, we're also sharing a couple of game-changing laundry insights that'll help your clothes, towels, and other laundry last longer. Sort by type, not by color. Most of us automatically separate lights from darks. But the experts say that sorting by fabric is a tactic you can take to preserve your pieces. Instead of sorting by color, combine hardy items (like towels, denim, and twill) and keep T-shirts, nightgowns, and other delicates aside for a separate load—likewise for other large or bulky items like throw blankets and sheets. (A little laundry room organization can help keep everything neatly separated.) Put your items in the dryer one by one. Untangle the items as you pull them out of the wash and add each to the dryer separately. This will help them dry completely within one cycle. Don't overstuff your washer (or dryer). Keep your laundry load around half or three-fourths of the way full for optimum efficiency. Laundry symbols seem like another language, but the washing machine symbols on your garments’ care labels tell you exactly how to do the washing and drying as well as give extra information on bleaching and ironing. Read on for our quick guide to what these wash symbols mean or download and print your own washing symbols chart to refer to when you see washing symbols on clothes you don’t recognize.Getting the temperature and wash cycle right is important for seeing great laundry results and can even prevent damage to your clothes. Understanding the clothes washing symbols below can give you an idea for temperature, indicated by the number of dots in the tub of water symbol, whereas different cycle types are represented by a tub with one or two lines drawn under it. Of course, you’ll want to sort your clothing by type and color so that you’re using the appropriate wash cycle for each garment. When looking at the wash symbols, the three-sided cup shape is meant to represent your washing machine tub, and these indicate what types of washing are safe for each particular garment. Machine Wash: This symbol indicates it is safe to wash the garment in a machine using the temperature and cycle indicated by other symbols.Hand Wash: The hand wash laundry symbol means you should not wash the garment in a machine and instead wash it by hand. Typically, this symbol applies to delicate garments made from fabrics like silk or linen. It may be safe to machine wash on a “hand wash” cycle setting if your machine has one, but care should be taken to protect the garment. You can also try putting the garment in a mesh bag or washing it alone to further protect it. If your garment is precious, vintage, or otherwise irreplaceable, take it to a professional cleaner. Do Not Wash: Garments or fabrics with this laundry symbol should not be washed in a machine or tub but should be taken to a professional dry cleaner when they become dirty. Dry Clean Only: Dry clean only garments must be taken to a dry cleaner for removal of dirt or other stains. Do Not Dry Clean: Clothing with the do not dry clean symbol should be washed using the gentlest setting on your washer. This will minimize agitation and potential damage to the fabric. You can also place inside a mesh bag or turn the garment inside out, running it on a short, delicate cycle to clean. Washing your clothing in the proper temperature water can affect how clean garments get during the wash as well as control wear and tear on the fabric. Not all fabrics are created equally, and some are more delicate than others, so understanding your clothes washing symbols and the proper temperature water to use when washing your clothes will get them as clean as possible while also ensuring they last longer.Cold Temperature Water: Clothes with this symbol (wash tub with a single dot) should be washed in cold water between 65°F and 85°F.Warm Temperature Water: Clothes with this symbol (wash tub with two dots) should be washed in warm water with a max temperature of 105°F. Hot Temperature Water: Clothes with this symbol (wash tub with three dots) should be washed in hot water with a max temperature of 120°F. Once you’ve determined that your garment is safe for machine washing and you know what temperature water to wash it in, it’s time to decide on what wash cycle to use. While many modern washing machines come with a wide variety of cycle settings, the washing machine symbols are quite straightforward, represented by a wash tub icon with either zero, one, or two lines underneath.Normal Cycle: This wash cycle symbol is simply a tub with water in it and no lines underneath. It is reserved for stronger, more durable garments like t-shirts, socks, or jeans that can simply be tossed in and washed. These cycles typically provide more agitation and work harder to remove dirt and grime. Permanent Press Cycle: This wash cycle symbol is a tub with water and a single line underneath. “Permanent Press” clothing is usually made from synthetic fibers like polyester that are specially treated to guard against wrinkles. The Permanent Press cycle uses warmer water and slower spin cycles to release and reduce existing wrinkles. Delicate Cycle: This wash cycle symbol is a tub with water and two lines underneath. These cycles are meant for more delicate garments that could be prone to damage and uses low agitation, slow spin, and colder temperature water to wash clothes and protect fabric. Important: Don't forget to look out for dry clean signs indicated by a circle, or hand wash symbols indicated by a tub of water with a hand sign, so you'll know when to avoid putting garments in the washing machine.Drying is an important part of the clothing care process, but we’ve all heard those scary stories of cashmere sweaters that come out of the wash three sizes too small. Knowing your clothing tag symbols—like the square with a circle in the middle that indicates tumble drying allowed—can help you avoid putting the wrong garment in the tumble dryer. Other symbols can give you additional information, such as a square with a horizontal line in the middle means you should dry the item flat, or the crossed-out twisted symbol, which tells you not to wring the garment. The temperature is given by the increasing number of dots inside a circle.When it comes to doing your laundry, the drying process is every bit as important as the washing. Using the incorrect dryer setting could result in shrinking or permanent damage that can render your clothes unwearable. Knowing your drying symbols will be invaluable to you and save your favorite clothes from harm.Tumble Drying Allowed: Any garment with the Tumble Drying Allowed symbol can go into your dryer, but pay special attention to any additional symbols that indicate appropriate heat settings or risk damage to your clothing. Do Not Tumble Dry: This symbol, a standard Tumble Dryer symbol with an “X” through it, means the garment should not be put into your dryer at all. Instead, opt to hang these on a clothesline or drying rack to dry. You could also put these garments through an extra spin cycle to remove as much excess water as possible before hanging to dry. Hang to Dry: Items with the Hang to Dry symbol should be put on a line to allow them to air dry. Be sure to hang in a shady area out of direct sunlight as the sunlight can introduce heat that could shrink or damage the garment while drying. Dry Flat: Clothing with the Dry Flat symbol shouldn’t be put into a tumble dryer or hung, but rather you should lay them flat on a drying rack or soft towel. Clothing made from natural fibers such as cotton, wool, silk, hemp, or linen usually need to be air dried while laying flat to avoid stretching the fibers. Do Not Wring: Represented by a twisted symbol with an “X” through it, garments with this symbol should not be wrung to remove excess water as this could damage or stretch the fabric. While a Tumble Dry symbol does indicate that it’s safe to dry your garment in a machine dryer, it doesn’t mean you are required to. Always remember that air drying on a line or flat on a rack or soft towel will always be a more gentle, eco-friendly way to dry your clothing. Tumble Dry: This universal symbol indicates that a garment is safe to Tumble Dry, generally on any heat setting. While heat will help clothing dry more quickly, it’s important to note that it can also cause garments to shrink. Low Heat: Garments with this symbol should be tumble dried on your dryer’s low heat setting. Higher heat settings can damage or shrink garments with this symbol. Medium Heat: Clothing with a Medium Heat symbol should be tumble dried on your dryer’s medium heat setting as higher heat could damage or shrink them. High Heat: Clothing with a High Heat symbol can be tumble dried on your dryer’s high heat setting. No Heat/Air: A garment that’s safe to tumble dry but that has the No Heat/Air Dry symbol should be placed in the dryer and dried using no heat whatsoever. To be extra safe, you could also dry these on a line or drying rack to avoid damaging delicate fabrics. Normal Cycle: The Normal Cycle symbol on your tumble dryer is a general go-to setting that will dry fabrics using heat. Items like towels, sheets, jeans, t-shirts, and sweatpants can be dried on this setting. Care should be taken when using this cycle as putting things like sweaters or other natural fiber garments could cause them to be shrunk or damaged. Permanent Press Cycle: The Permanent Press Cycle symbol on your tumble dryer is a setting that can help remove or reduce wrinkles in fabrics with synthetic fibers. This more casual cycle can also be used to dry some natural fiber fabrics that wrinkle easily as the Permanent Press Cycle tends to be more gentle with medium heat. Delicate/Gentle Cycle: This low-heat setting will take longer to dry clothes but is safer for delicate fabrics or garments prone to shrinking. If you want to use bleach, you’ll want to look at your garment’s fabric care label to see if there is a bleach symbol indicated by a triangle or more importantly a do not bleach symbol, which is a triangle crossed out. Recognizing these signs can save your garment from getting permanently damaged by chlorine bleach.Some fabrics look great after ironing but others, like more delicate materials, can be damaged. There are even some fabrics that simply need special care when ironing. For example, if you want to iron your new dress shirt and you want to know if it can be ironed safely, look for the iron symbol on your garment, represented by a little iron symbol with dots in the middle that denote the temperature setting, like those shown below.Don’t let laundry symbols confuse you. Get this printable laundry symbols guide and keep it to hand the next time you do the laundry. Once you download this laundry symbols chart, you’ll be a pro when it comes to doing your laundry. Download nowLaundry symbols are there to guide you so your clothes get the care they deserve. Make sure you use the right laundry detergent for the wash cycle you pick, like Tide® Plus Coldwater Clean for cold washes or use a detergent like Tide PODS® that’s suitable for any temperature. Get the best out of your laundry, with a little help from Tide. If you need more detailed information, visit our comprehensive guide on how to do laundry. Skip to content   Skip to footer navigation Cotton, silk, linen, wool, rayon, lycra – our clothes are made from a huge number of different materials, and just as they have different properties, so too do they have different requirements in the wash. But how do you know what you need to do to take the best care of your new shirt or slacks? The care instructions written on the garment tags will tell you, you just have to learn how to read them. On this page: When it comes to caring for your clothes, symbols developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) were used rather than words to convey information irrespective of language. While it seems daunting – there's over 50 of them after all – it's actually not, because the symbols are all based on a handful of basic shapes relating to a different aspect of garment care – bleaching (a triangle), washing (a tub with water), drying (a square), wringing (a twisted garment), dry cleaning (a circle) and ironing (an iron, unsurprisingly). Each symbol then has modifiers denoting a specific meaning, but the most common – an X or cross – has an almost universal meaning: don't do it. Do you have to follow laundry care symbols exactly? Cleaning your clothes correctly is key to keeping them fresh and looking their best for a long time – getting it wrong in the laundry means they won't go the distance, and you could even destroy them completely in one wash.Most clothing manufacturers recommend the most conservative cleaning methods to minimise the risk of damage to your clothes – for instance, a fabric labelled as 'dry clean only' may be perfectly safe for hand washing, so you probably don't need to follow care instructions religiously. But you also shouldn't ignore them entirely – there's a risk of fading, shrinking or otherwise damaging clothes if you mistreat them in the wash, especially when it comes to bleaching or tumble drying. Paying attention to the material your garment is made of will help you make an informed decision about how much (or little) leeway you have. So let's get down to it. Here's what the different washing symbols on your clothes mean. Bleaching symbols A triangle symbol relates to bleach. A clear triangle means that any type of bleach can be used on the fabric. A triangle with two slanted lines means use a non-chlorine or oxygen-based bleach. Alternatively, the label may state "No Chlorine Bleach". An X over a solid colour triangle means Do Not Bleach. Not all garments will carry a bleach symbol, but that doesn't mean open season, and you should never use bleach on wool, silk, or leather garments. Dry cleaning symbols A circle symbol relates to dry cleaning. Some clothes won't fare well under the rigours of your washing machine and can only be dry cleaned. And while we said you can take some of these care instructions with a grain of salt, you should generally adhere to the dry clean only instruction. Some dry cleaning symbols are also for the benefit of the dry cleaner, telling them which chemicals they should use. A circle means the item can be dry cleaned. Letters inside the circle (e.g. A, P, F) tell the dry cleaner which chemical and method to use. An X or cross over the circle indicates the garment should not be dry cleaned. A diagonal line at the bottom left of the circle denotes short cycle. A diagonal line at the bottom right of the circle denotes low heat. Air drying symbols A square relates to line drying. While line drying is generally much safer for your clothes than using a clothes dryer, there's still a few things that you may need to be aware of lest you stretch, shrink or fade your favourite outfit. A drooping line inside the square means you can hang your clothes outside to dry. Three vertical lines inside the square means drip dry indoors on a clothes horse or rack. One horizontal line indicates you should lay the garment flat to keep its shape while it dries. Handwashing symbol The symbol for hand wash only is, unsurprisingly, a hand. This indicates you should wash the garment item by hand at 40°C or lower. Alternatively, you can use your washing machine's hand wash program if it has one – this is a gentle program suitable for delicate fabrics. Wondering if your laundry detergent lives up to its cleaning claims? Our experts reveal the best and worst laundry detergents in our lab test. Ironing symbols A stylised iron in the square denotes, again unsurprisingly, ironing. Remember, the X means don't do it. An X through the steam coming from the bottom of the iron means don't use steam. The number of dots in the iron indicate what temperature you can iron the garment at. The more dots, the hotter the ironing temperature. One dot: low temperature (woollens, silk and other delicate fabrics).Two dots: medium temperature (synthetics).Three dots: high temperature (linen and cotton).No dots: iron at any temperature. An X or cross through the iron means the garment cannot be ironed. An iron with two or three lines at the bottom and an X or cross over it means dry iron only – no steam ironing. Synthetics and cottons symbols A plain tub with water indicates wash, rinse and spin intensity. Garments carrying this symbol should not be wrung out by hand. A plain tub indicates the garment can be spun and rinsed as normal. A bar under the tub means use a low spin speed. Two bars under the tub means the garment needs a gentle wash action, but can be spun and rinsed normally. An X or cross through the tub means the garment should not be washed and may need dry cleaning instead. Washing temperature symbols A symbol of a tub with a number or dots indicates maximum wash temperature. One dot denotes a cold wash.Two dots denotes a warm wash.Three dots indicates hot water. A tub with a number in it gives you more precise temperature guidance and can range from 30–95°C. Remember, that's the maximum temperature – you can always wash in cold (or even just colder) water, and save on your energy bill. Clothes dryer drying symbols A square with a circle in it indicates clothes dryer drying. This is important because incorrect dryer use is one of the most common ways to damage your clothes, and over using your clothes dryer can rack up huge energy bills. The dots indicate heat levels. One dot – use low heat. Two dots – use medium heat. Three dots – use high heat. An X or cross over the symbol means the garment is not suitable for the clothes dryer. Ever ruined a beloved garment in the dryer? Read about our 10 common dryer mistakes (and how you can avoid them). Wringing symbols A twisted knot indicates hand wringing. Wringing out your clothes can help get the water out, but it has the potential to seriously damage the fibres in the fabric, so don't ignore the no wringing symbol. A twisted knot symbol means the garment can be wrung out without damage. An X or cross over the symbol means the garment is not suitable to be wrung out. For more than 60 years, we've been making a difference for Australian consumers. In that time, we've never taken ads or sponsorship. Instead we're funded by members who value expert reviews and independent product testing. With no self-interest behind our advice, you don't just buy smarter, you get the answers that you need. You know without hesitation what's safe for you and your family. And you'll never be alone when something goes wrong or a business treats you unfairly. Learn more about CHOICE membership today Stock images: Getty, unless otherwise stated. Washing labels aren't always the most straightforward to read, and if you don't know what they mean you could end up ruining your clothes.Thankfully the symbols they use are (mostly) universal, so once you've learned what each represents (as we explain below) you shouldn't have any problems no matter what you find in your laundry basket.In the market for a new washing machine? See our guide on the best washing machines for more advice and recommendations.Bleaching symbolsA triangle means you can safely use a cold, dilute solution of bleachIf the triangle has two stripes, only a non-chlorine, colour-safe bleach should be used If the triangle has a cross over it, the item can’t be bleachedDry cleaning symbolsSome clothes can – or must – be dry cleaned.A circle means the garment is suitable for dry cleaningIf there’s a letter inside the circle, it tells the dry cleaner which chemical wash and method to useIf the circle has a cross over it, the item shouldn’t be dry cleanedA line on the bottom left of the circle means short cycleA line to the bottom right is for low heatClothes manufacturers tend to give good cleaning advice. So, even if you suspect they’re being over cautious, it’s best to follow what they say.Drying symbolsDrying your clothes can be where it all goes wrong and you either end up stretching your favourite wool jumper or shrinking your best top. In contrast to tumble drying, natural drying symbols can be harder to interpret.Here's what they actually mean:If the square has one drooping line, this means you can hang your clothes to dry on a washing line outsideIf the square has three vertical lines in it, you can drip dry your clothes on a rack indoorsIf the square has one horizontal line, you should dry the garment flat to keep its shapeHandwash symbolsIf the tub contains a handwash program, wash the item by hand at 40°C or lower.Many washing machines have a handwash program. This is for delicate garments such as cashmere or silk, and cleans more gently than the normal setting to prevent clothes snagging or shrinking.Read our guide to using different washing machine programs at cooler temperatures to learn more about your options.Ironing symbolsThe dots on ironing symbols correspond to the dots on an iron’s temperature settings: the more dots there are, the more heat can be applied.If the iron symbol doesn't have any dots, the garment can be ironed at any temperatureThree dots are for linens and cottonsTwo dots are for syntheticsOne dot is for the most delicate items such as woollens and silk If the iron symbol has a cross through it, the garment isn't suitable to be ironedIf the symbol has two or three lines protruding from the bottom of the iron with a cross over it, you must dry iron and not steam ironMake light work of your ironing by picking the best steam iron Synthetics and cottons washing symbolsThe bars underneath the tub icon refer to rinsing and spinning. Such items shouldn’t be wrung by hand. If there are no bars, the garment can be spun and rinsed as normalOne bar indicates that the spin speed should be reducedTwo bars means the clothes need a mild wash action, but can be spun and rinsed normallyIf there's a cross through the tub, that item shouldn't be washed and will probably need to be dry cleanedRead our guides on washing machine programs and how to wash clothesWashing temperatures symbolsIf your clothes are machine washable, then you'll see this tub icon on the label. The number within the tub icon shows the maximum temperature that item of clothing can be washed at. This can range from 30°C to 95°C.Many claim that washing at 30°C instead of 40°C is the key to saving money and energy. For this reason, you might opt for a lower temperature to the label guide.But while it may conserve energy and save on running costs, 30°C doesn't always remove tougher stains such as oil and grease.For advice on deciding which is the best temperature to use, read our washing machine temperatures guide.See our reviews of the best washing machines from our expert testsTumble drying symbolsGetting tumble drying right is easy if you use the correct temperature.A circle inside a square means you can tumble dry the garmentThe dots indicate temperature – one for low heat, two for slightly higher heat, and three for high heatA cross over the symbol means you shouldn’t tumble dry the garmentSome clothes may appear similar, but have different labels – they’re most likely made from different fibres or blends. Some fibres or blends can change size or become ‘furred’ by tumble drying. An item that’s suitable for tumble drying will have been treated to protect against these effects.If you're currently looking to buy one, not all models will dry clothes properly. We've found some in our tests that leave clothes sopping wet as well as driving up your electricity bills. Avoid these models by seeing our best tumble dryers Wringing symbolsWringing out your clothes is possibly the most common mistake made during hand washing or drying clothes without a dryer. Twisting the fabric by hand can seriously damage your favourite item of clothing. If you're not sure, look for the symbols above on your clothing label: Symbol on the left means you can wring out your clothes Symbol on the right with a cross through it means don't do thisIf you're looking for a new washing machine, go straight to our washing machine reviews. The Wunderlabel comprehensive guide all laundry symbols explained.Manufacturers use laundry symbols to inform consumers about the proper laundry care of their garments. By following the care instructions on the care tags, you can significantly prolong the life and quality of your textiles. It is therefore worth learning the meaning of laundry symbols that depict instructions for washing, bleaching, drying, ironing and professional cleaning.1. How to Read Laundry Symbols - Meaning of Care SymbolsUnderstanding how to read laundry symbols is essential for properly caring for your clothes. In the USA, a textile labeling law dictates the specific order in which the five key care symbols—Washing, Bleaching, Drying, Ironing, and Dry Cleaning—must appear, ensuring consumers can easily interpret them. 1.1. Wash Symbols - The TubAll wash symbols are depicted by a tub of water. The meaning of wash symbols:The number of dots inside in the tub indicate the temperature and the dashes indicate the spin cycle. Warning symbols are represented by a cross.1.1.1. General Washing SymbolsMachine wash: This wash tub symbol indicates that the machine can safely wash clothes at the specified temperature in degrees and wash cycle. Do not wash: The cross on the tub indicates that garments and other textiles are not suitable for hand washing or machine washing.This mainly applies to delicate clothing such as suits, wedding dresses and the like. Hand wash: The symbol with a hand in the tub indicates that the laundry may only be washed by hand. 1.1.2. Water Temperature Symbols for washing your clothes in the washing machineThe dots in the tub determine the temperature of the water. The meaning of laundry symbols with temperature:The more dots in the tub, the higher the water temperature. Wash the item on the appropriate heat setting. 1.Cold water: Clothes with this symbol (single dot) should be washed in cold water between 65°F and 85°F.2. Warm water: Clothing with this symbol (two dots) should be washed in warm water with a maximum temperature of 105°F.3. Hot water: Clothing with this symbol (three dots) should be washed in hot water with a maximum temperature of 120°F.4. Hot water: Clothing with this symbol (four dots) should be washed in hot water with a maximum temperature of 140°F.5. Hot water: Clothing with this symbol (five dots) should be washed in hot water with a maximum temperature of 160°F.6. Hot water: Clothing with this symbol (six dots) should be washed in hot water with a maximum temperature of 200°F.1.1.3. Wash Symbols for SpinningThe symbol represents spinning through a washing tub with no lines, one line, or two lines underneath the tub.The meaning of washing machine symbols:Normal Cycle: This wash symbol is represented by a tub of water with no lines underneath. This means the washing machine is spinning at normal speed. It is used for more durable and sturdy pieces such as T-shirts, socks or jeans. Permanent Press Cycle: The symbol for this cycle is a tub of water with a line underneath. This means that the continuous press cycle uses warmer water and slower spin speeds to loosen and reduce existing creases. Delicate/Gentle Cycle: The symbol for this cycle is a water-filled container with two lines below it. It indicates the delicate wash cycle, which requires a gentle wash at a low temperature and spin speed.1.2. Bleaching Symbols - The Triangle Bleach symbols on laundry labels indicate if and how the garment can be bleached. The most common bleaching symbols are 1. Bleaching allowed: An empty triangle or a triangle with a square in it means that bleaching is allowed. 2. Bleaching not allowed: A crossed-out triangle means that the garment must not be bleached. Do not use chlorine or oxygen bleach.3. Bleach not allowed: A black triangle with an X inside is an obsolete symbol and means that bleaching is not allowed. 4. Bleach allowed: A triangle with two diagonal lines allows the use of oxygen as a bleaching agent (non-chlorine bleach).5. Chlorine bleach: A triangle with CL in the center means that the laundry may only be bleached with chlorine.1.3. Dryer Symbols - The SquareThe square with a circle in the middle of the square is the typical symbol for drying clothes. This symbol on a laundry label means that you can machine dry or air dry.However, if the symbol has a cross through it, the garment is not suitable for tumble drying. Different variations of this dryer symbol give instructions on which drying programs and temperature settings (indicated by dots) you should use.1.3.1. General Dryer Symbols 1. Tumble dry: A square with a circle on a care label means that the garment can be tumble dried. 2. Do not tumble dry: A standard tumble dry symbol with an "X" means that the garment should not be tumble dried.3. Do not wring: The symbol of a twisted garment with an "X" means that you should not wring to remove excess water. 4. Hang to dry: This symbol is a square with a curved line at the top. Items marked with this laundry symbol should be hung on a clothesline to dry. This drying method is gentler, saves energy, reduces creasing and odors.5. Dry flat: The dry flat symbol with a horizontal line in the middle of the square means the clothing should be laid out to dry on a flat surface. This method is usually recommended for delicate fabrics such as wool, knitwear or fine silk to prevent loss of shape, shrinkage and other damage.6. Drip Dry: The square filled with three vertical lines means that the dripping wet item should be hung on a washing line and left to drip dry. 1.3.2. Symbols for Dryer TemperatureThe dots in the square refer to the tumble dryer temperature.1. Low temperature: The low temperature symbol is a square with a dot inside the circle. This indicates that the garment should be washed, dried or ironed at a low temperature.2. Medium heat: A square with two dots inside a circle means medium heat in the dryer. 3. High heat: The high heat symbol is a square with three dots inside a circle. This means you can wash, dry and iron clothes at a high temperature.4. Tumble dry: The tumble-dry symbol is a square with a circle. This means that you can dry in a tumble dryer. 5. No heat / air only: The symbol for "no heat" is a small square with a black circle. This means that you should tumble dry without heat.1.3.3. Symbols for Drying in the Tumble DryerThe lines under the square refer to the tumble dryer cycles. 1. Normal cycle: If the square has no line under it, you can dry your clothes using the normal settings. The normal cycle is suitable for drying items such as towels, bed linen, jeans, T-shirts and sweatpants. Use caution with natural fiber textiles as they are more susceptible to damage.2. Permanent Press Cycle: If there is a line under the square with a circle, you should use a gentle drying program.3. Delicate/Gentle Cycle: If there is a line under the square with a circle, you should use a special gentle program for delicate laundry when drying.1.4. Ironing SymbolsSome fabrics look great after ironing, while others, such as delicate fabrics, are damaged. Other fabrics require special attention when ironing.Ironing symbols on clothing labels tell you how to iron and at what temperature it is safe to do so. Here are some of the most common ironing symbols and what they mean: Ironing allowed: A plain iron symbol means you can iron your pieces. The lowest setting is recommended for the most delicate fabrics.Low iron temperature: An ironing symbol with a dot in the middle indicates that you should iron at a low temperature. This is usually for delicate fabrics such as silk or acrylics, where damage can occur.Medium iron temperature: Two dots in the ironing symbol indicate that the garment should be ironed at a medium temperature. Suitable for fabrics like polyester or wool.High iron temperature: Three dots in the ironing symbol mean that the item should be ironed at a high temperature. Suitable for durable fabrics such as cotton or linen.Do not iron: A crossed-out ironing symbol indicates that ironing is not recommended. Doing so may damage your textiles.1.5. Chemical cleaningThe dry-cleaning symbol on clothing labels indicates that the garment has special cleaning and care requirements take it to a professional drying / professional cleaning service. Here are some common care symbols and meaning of these laundry symbols: 1. P - Professional cleaning required: A circle with a P means professional dry-clean with any solvent except trichloroethylene.2. F - Liquid cleaning required: The symbol "F" indicates that the garment should be cleaned only with petroleum-based solvents.This should be used frequently to clean delicate fabrics.3. A - All Solvents: The symbol “A” means that you can use any solvents to clean the fabric.4. W - Wet clean: The symbol with the circle and "W" in it stands for "Wet Clean". It indicates that the garment is suitable for wet cleaning. You should use water and special laundry detergents instead of conventional dry cleaning methods.5. The "Do not dry clean" symbol is usually represented by a crossed-out circle. You should not dry clean.2. Download Our Guide to Laundry SymbolsDownload (pdf) and print the comprehensive Wunderlabel laundry symbols guide to help you understand what each care symbol means and how to best care for your clothes.The laundry symbols on our labels have been historical developed to be internationally standardized. They provide clear instructions for the correct care, regardless of the customer's language or country of origin. Wunderlabel is a leading manufacturer of premium laundry labels. We offer the highest quality and a wide range of products. With many years of experience in the industry, we offer customized solutions for all your laundry labeling needs. Find all care labels in the configurator or in the Wunderlabel store. They are clearly explained and you can design your own labels with different symbols under "care labels".Always follow the laundry care instructions. Perfect clothing care gives you long lasting garments and is therefore even great for the environment. Let’s face it, the laundry symbols found on clothes tags can be incredibly confusing and difficult to decipher. Although some of the best washing machines do offer some assistance in the form of their companion smart apps which tell you how clothes should be washed, you still may find yourself needing some extra help. That’s why we’ve put together this handy guide explaining all the laundry symbols. Keep reading to see all the washing icons explained. Before we go into specific detail about the meaning of washing icons, we’ll start with an overview of what each symbol represents. In general, washing symbols are divided into five categories: washing, bleaching, dry cleaning, ironing and drying and are depicted respectively as: wash tub, triangle, circle, iron and square. (From left to right) Symbols for: washing, bleaching, dry cleaning, ironing and drying Put simply, the wash tub symbol on its own simply means that the garment is machine washable. Advertisement In the UK, you’ll see a number inside the wash tub which shows the maximum temperature which the garment should be washed at and can range from 20°C up to 95°C. Wash tub symbols depicting max temperature a garment should be washed at In lieu of a number, in the US you’ll see a dot in the wash tub instead. Just one dot means the garment should be washed at a maximum of 30°C, while two dots means a maximum of 40°C and three dots reflects an optimum temperature of 50°C or below. This continues, with four dots equating to 60°C, five dots meaning 70° and so on. Finally, if you see a hand icon in the wash tub then this means the garment is for hand-wash only. This means you shouldn’t put this in the washing machine and, instead, wash it by hand in a sink or basin. A cross through the wash tub means that the garment shouldn’t be hand or machine washed at all. In this instance, you should check for dry clean symbols instead. Wash tub symbols for hand wash only and do not machine wash Advertisement If you see bars underneath the wash tub then this refers to its intended wash cycle, specifically rinsing and spinning. While no bars means the item can be spun and rinsed as normal, one bar shows that you should reduce the spin speed. Two bars means that although the garment requires a mild wash, it can be spun and rinsed as usual. Wash tub symbols for choosing the optimum cycle First and perhaps most intuitively, if the iron symbol has a cross through it then this means you should simply not iron the garment. Plus if the iron has two or three lines from the bottom along with a cross over it, then this means you can only dry iron and not steam iron. Iron symbols showing “do not iron” and “do not steam iron” If the iron symbol has no dots inside, then this means the garment can be ironed at any temperature. Otherwise, just one dot in the iron means the garment is delicate and can only withstand a maximum temperature of around 110°C. Advertisement Two dots allows for ironing up to 150°C while garments sporting three dots can withstand a maximum temperature of 200°C. Irons showing different temperature levels for garments Although many of the best tumble dryers are partnered with a companion washing machine, and can automatically set its programmes to best suit the wash, you should still take a look at the garment’s tag beforehand to avoid damage. Luckily, the tumble drying symbols are fairly easy to understand and work in a similar way to the US version of the wash tub cycles. If the square has a cross through it, then this means the item simply cannot and should not be tumble dried. Temperature symbols for tumble drying If the square has a circle inside then this means it’s safe for tumble drying at all temperatures. If the circle inside has one dot then the garment should only be tumble dried on a low heat, two dots means it can cope with a medium heat while three dots allows for a high heat. Advertisement Things start to get a bit more complicated when it comes to general drying. A plain square means it should be air dried instead. A line running horizontally across the middle of the square means the garment should be dried flat and a square with two diagonal lines in the top-left corner means the garment should dry in the shade. Symbols from top left, going clockwise: Air dry, dry flat, dry in shade, dry indoors on rack, hang dry A square with three vertical lines inside means your clothes can be dried on a rack indoors while one drooping line means they can be hung outside to dry. There are lots of symbols for dry cleaning, which explain how a garment should be cleaned, however more often that not you won’t need to worry about this as it’s more for the dry cleaner to deal with. For the most part, you just need to look out for a circle which shows that the item can be dry cleaned. Naturally, a crossed out circle means the item cannot be dry cleaned. Advertisement Symbols from left to right: Dry clean, do not dry clean, seek professional wet cleaning You may see a letter inside the circle, which explains how the garment should be dry cleaned. If, however, you see a letter inside the circle which then has a cross through it, then this means that particular dry cleaning method should not be used on the item. A ‘W’ in the circle means that you should seek professional wet cleaning only, while one line underneath means it needs gentle wet cleaning. Finally, two lines underneath shows the garment needs extra-gentle, wet cleaning. Bleaching can be a risky business so it’s imperative that you check your labels carefully before starting. If you see a blank triangle then this means any type of bleach can be used on the garment but if the triangle is crossed-out then this means bleach is not allowed. Two diagonal lines inside the triangle means you can use non-chlorine bleach only while a triangle with CL inside means you can only use chlorine bleach. Advertisement Symbols from top left, going clockwise: Safe for bleach, do not bleach, use chlorine bleach, use non-chlorine bleach If you’re still not certain how you should wash or dry your clothes then you can actually turn to your iPhone for further assistance. Simply take a photo of the laundry tag on your item, then open the image up in your Photos app. From here, tap the i button in the bottom panel then tap Look Up Laundry Care, which should tell you exactly how you should wash your garment. Washing and drying our clothes is an essential household task that is as important for tidiness as it is for our wardrobe. Of course, there are proper ways to sort laundry, get stubborn stains out, and fold and hang clothing—but there are also very specific instructions for cleaning an article of clothing, and those requirements vary from garment to garment. Fortunately, every piece of clothing comes with a cheat sheet: Laundry care tags with symbols revealing the garment's needs. When decoded, the symbols offer up the exact type of care an item requires to keep it looking like new. "Different fabrics and garments have specific care requirements," says Alicia Sokolowski, co-founder of AspenClean. "Following the laundry symbols ensures that your clothes are treated properly, reducing the risk of damage, fading, or shrinking (so don't be lazy—check the labels)." Decoding laundry symbols can be confusing—what does a circle in a square with two dots actually mean? For help, we spoke to the experts to explain what the most common laundry symbols are and why it's essential to follow them to keep your clothing in tip-top shape. Alicia Sokolowski, co-founder of AspenClean Mary Gagliardi, in-house scientist and cleaning expert for Clorox Zack Kutchma, associate brand manager for Swash If you want to make sure you are properly cleaning and caring for your clothes, understanding laundry symbols is essential. "Proper care can help your clothing last longer," Sokolowski says. "Following the laundry symbols helps prevent premature wear and tear, preserving the appearance and quality of your garments." Understanding laundry symbols also helps reduce the environmental impact of doing laundry. "Incorrect washing or drying can lead to excessive energy and water consumption," says Sokolowski. "Following laundry symbols can help reduce your environmental footprint by using resources more efficiently." Not only that but the longer you can make your clothes last, the less you are contributing to the fashion industry's waste problem. There are five main laundry symbols that everyone should commit to memory, which are "standardized symbols that provide information on how to care for clothing and textiles," says Sokolowski. There are more than five symbols out there, but, according to Sokolowski, these are the main ones to know. It's also important to note that these symbols will, generally speaking, always be listed in the same order on a tag, as required by the Care Labeling Rule from the Federal Trade Commission. "In doubt, the key is to look for those symbols and pay attention to the instructions and any accompanying text, which should provide guidance on how to care for the specific garment," Sokolowski says. You're probably most familiar with wash symbols. "Washing symbols include a pictogram that looks like a washing tub," says Zach Kutchma, associate brand manager at Swash. "Inside the tub you’ll find specific instructions on the preferred method, including the way to wash, the preferred water temperature, and the preferred cycle or wash setting." After you wash your clothing, it's important to know how to dry them (or conversely, to know they shouldn't go into the dryer at all). Drying symbols usually include "a square, usually with an interior circle for machine drying," says Mary Gagliardi, in-house scientist and cleaning expert for Clorox. "Dots show the recommended drying temperature, and lines indicate special tumbling settings or drip drying and line drying." Bleach instructions will be denoted with a triangle symbol. Whether it's an empty triangle or it contains other symbols will tell you whether you can use any bleach, non-chlorine bleach, or no bleach at all. Ironing symbols look like—you guessed it!—an actual iron. "Variations include dots for temperature, as well as lines for steam X’d out to indicate no steam allowed," says Gagliardi. "An X through the iron means 'Do Not Iron.'" The basic dry clean symbol is a simple circle. A circle with an X through it means the garment should not be dry cleaned. Beyond the most basic washing symbol, there are a few more symbols to know that can help guide you in how to wash your clothing. Machine wash symbols include variations on the standard wash basin symbol with dots or lines to indicate further instructions. Wash basin with one dot: Machine wash cold, at or below 86 degrees FahrenheitWash basin with two dots: Machine wash warm, at or below 105 degrees FahrenheitWash basin with five dots: Machine wash hot, at or below 160 degrees FahrenheitWash basin with no dots: Machine wash, normalWash basin with one line underneath: Machine wash, permanent pressWash basin with two lines underneath: Machine wash, delicate There are a few other wash symbols you might also see, generally in regards to hand washing a garment. Wash basin with hand: Hand wash, don't machine washWash basin with an X: No washing. According to Sokolowski, this might indicate the garment needs another type of special care, like dry cleaning.Crossed out twisted clothing: Do not wring or twist to remove excess water Knowing how to correctly dry your clothes is extremely important. Improperly drying your clothes can result in shrunken clothing and other problems. Here are the laundry symbols to know for how to dry a garment. Square with three vertical lines: Drip drySquare with one horizontal line: Lay flat to drySquare with curved line at the top: Hang the item to dry on a line or hangerSquare with curved line and two lines in the top left corner: Dry the item in a shady spot to prevent fading from the sunSquare with circle and two dots: Tumble dry, mediumSquare with blacked-out circle: Tumble dry, no heatSquare with circle and one dot: Tumble dry, lowSquare with circle and three dots: Tumble dry, highSquare with circle and no dots: Tumble dry, any heat settingCrossed out square with circle: Don't dry the item in your machine dryer When it comes to making our whites brighter, bleach is often the easiest way to achieve the goal. But, be sure you carefully read the laundry symbols for bleach, as some garments should not be cleaned with chlorinated bleach, for example. Here are the bleach symbols you should know. Empty triangle: Any type of bleach can be used—according to Sokolowski, this includes chlorine, oxygen, and color-safe bleachesTriangle with two lines: Use non-chlorine bleach onlyCrossed-out triangle: Don't bleach the item Knowing how to iron your clothes the right way is paramount to ensuring wrinkle-free clothing while also not inadvertently damaging a garment in the process. Learning the laundry symbols for ironing will help you differentiate between items that can be ironed at different temperatures or items that shouldn't be steamed. Iron with one dot: Low-heat ironingIron with two dots: Medium heat ironingIron with three dots: High-heat ironingIron with no dots: Any temperature can be usedIron with bottom crossed out: Steam ironing should not be usedCrossed-out iron: The garment should not be ironed at all When you shouldn't machine wash an item of clothing at home, and it's labeled as dry-clean only, you'll see these symbols that will help your dry cleaner know precisely how to care for the item. Of course, it's also possible to dry clean clothes at home, so learning these laundry symbols is useful. Circle: Dry cleanCircle with bottom right line: Dry clean, low heat onlyCircle with top right line: Dry clean, no steamCircle with bottom left line: Dry clean, short cycleCircle with top left line: Dry clean, reduced moistureCrossed out circle: Don't dry clean the garment Our experts shared a few more tips for making sure your clothes come out perfect every time it's wash day. Different fabric types typically require different types of care, which is why knowing laundry symbols is important. "Symbols may also indicate specific fabric care instructions, such as 'wool,' 'silk,' 'cotton,' 'polyester,' and more," says Sokolowski. "These symbols provide guidance tailored to the material used in the garment." For items like socks where you won't find a tag, check the package it came in. "Where no label on the actual item is required, it must be included on the packaging, which is often discarded immediately after purchase," says Gagliardi. "Always note the care instructions when this is the case to avoid problems later, especially with wool socks!" If a laundry symbol is included, there's a reason for it. "If a care procedure doesn’t matter (like you can iron at any temperature or any bleach is suitable) then the symbol doesn’t need to be included; whenever a symbol is included it’s important to pay attention to it," Gagliardi says. "Since they are all in the same place on the care label, it’s easy to review them all, especially with a new item you aren’t familiar with." 1Mariana TumaGood news: You don't have to take this garment to the dry cleaner. Just toss it into your washing machine at home.RELATED: The Best Washing Machines2Mariana TumaTo do this, fill your sink with water and detergent, per the bottle's instructions. Turn your item inside out and immerse it in the sudsy water. Let soak for 5 minutes, then empty the sink, refill it with cool water and re-immerse to rinse. Roll gently in a towel to remove excess moisture. Advertisement - Continue Reading Below3Mariana TumaUnfortunately, this garment isn't immune to dirt and sweat. This symbol actually means you need to take said item to the dry cleaner, instead of washing it yourself at home.4Mariana TumaChances are the garment you're about to wash includes a color that tends to bleed or is made of a delicate fabric, so you'll want to select the cold temperature setting. Cold water also saves energy.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below5Mariana TumaMost clothes can be washed in warm water to offer optimal cleaning without shrinking or fading.6Mariana TumaWashing clothes in hot water is best for removing heavy soil and killing germs, but since it's a bit harsh, make sure you spot this symbol before selecting this cycle.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below7Mariana TumaFour dots indicate that you can use the hottest temperature to wash your clothes. 8Mariana TumaIf you have a batch of whites in dire need of some brightening, make sure they all feature this symbol on their care tag, which indicates it's safe to use any type of bleach. For colors, choose an non-chlorine version. Advertisement - Continue Reading Below9Mariana TumaThe same goes for this symbol, except the additional two lines means the formula you use can't contain chlorine. Use a bleach that says it's color-safe. 10Mariana TumaBad news: Even if you got a stain on your shirt, any clothes with tags featuring this symbol means they shouldn't go near any type of bleach.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below11Mariana TumaThis circle indicates that your item should be cleaned by a professional cleaner. Using your washing machine can damage or destroy the fabric. 12Mariana TumaA circle with an "X" over it indicates dry cleaning might be too harsh for the item, so you'll likely need to hand or machine wash it instead.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below13Mariana TumaThis icon means you're safe to toss the item into the dryer, just make sure you check the temperature recommendation before you start up your machine.14Mariana TumaOne dot in the middle of the dryer symbol indicates you should use a low heat temperature.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below15Mariana TumaTwo dots in the middle of the dryer indicates a medium heat setting should be used to dry your items of clothing.16Mariana TumaAnd three dots means (how'd you know?) high heat is a safe temperature for the item you're trying to dry.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below17Mariana TumaTo save your piece of clothing from getting ruined, don't use heat if the dryer symbol features a filled-in circle. Select the air-only cycle.18Mariana Tuma When you see this symbol, select your washer's "permanent press" or "casual" cycle for the best results. This cycle minimizes wrinkling to help casual fabrics — even those treated with permanent press finishes — to emerge smoother and less creased. That means less ironing for you.Advertisement - Continue Reading Below19Mariana TumaIf your garment features this symbol, it means you shouldn't put it in the dryer. Instead, you should dry it using one of the following methods.20Mariana TumaTo protect your garment from fading, this symbol indicates you should line dry your item in the shade — not in the sun.Lauren Smith McDonoughSenior EditorLauren is a senior editor at Hearst. She was previously the senior editor at WomansDay.com and the home editor at GoodHousekeeping.com and HouseBeautiful.com. Her book club, ramen, and jean jackets are a few of her favorite things.Mariah ThomasAssistant EditorMariah Thomas (she/her) is an assistant editor for Good Housekeeping, where she covers home and lifestyle content. Mariah has more than four years of editorial experience, having written for TLC, Apartment Therapy, Women's Health and Avocado Magazine. She received her master's degree in journalism at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism and published her first book, Heart and Soul: Poems of Thoughts and Emotions, in 2019. She's also the founder of RTF Community, a platform for creatives of color to connect, learn and showcase their work. Watch Next Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

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