

Washing Wool Sweaters

1. Before washing the sweater, lay it over a piece of brown wrapping paper (an opened grocery bag works well) or freezer paper and trace its shape so you know its size. Keep this pattern for use when blocking the sweater to dry.
2. Dissolve detergent or soap in warm water. The water temperature should feel comfortable to your hands. Do not use a detergent that contains bleach or the protein enzyme, protease. Allow the sweater to soak in the detergent solution for three minutes. Keep agitation to a minimum. Wool fibers have scales that permanently interlock when wet and rubbed together; this interlocking causes the felting shrinkage common to wool products. Never use chlorine bleach with wool because it causes fibers to yellow and degrade.
3. Rinse the sweater thoroughly by squeezing fresh warm water through it until suds are gone. Again, keep agitation to a minimum.
4. If the sweater is heavily soiled, repeat the above two steps.
5. To dry, roll and squeeze the sweater in clean towels to help absorb water so it will dry faster. Put a piece of clear plastic, such as an old dry cleaning bag, over the pattern you made earlier. The plastic will prevent anything on the paper pattern from coming off onto the sweater.
6. Pat the sweater out onto the plastic-covered pattern so that it fits the shape and size previously traced. This is called blocking.

If you pat the sweater flat as you lay it out, it may not need any pressing after it dries. Drying the sweater flat will help prevent shrinkage. Because wool sweaters require long drying times, find an out of the way place to let it dry. An area rug in the corner of a heated room may do well. If the sweater begins to draw up at the seams, carefully stretch them out and hold them in place by pinning to the rug.

7. If the sweater needs pressing, use light steam and a press cloth. Over pressing can contribute to shrinkage or cause an unattractive glazed appearance.

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