

Cleaning Vinyl Siding Yourself

Vinyl siding has gained in popularity over the years for many reasons. Unlike wood and masonite siding, it does not need to be painted on a regular basis; it is durable; attractive and affordable. Vinyl siding is low maintenance but does need cleaning on a periodic basis. Rain will wash off most dirt and debris. Some areas of a house may be sheltered from rain including under eaves, bay windows and porch roofs. Rain will also not always effectively remove the siding pigment that is oxidized by the sun and has a “chalky” appearance.

Light dirt may be removed by spraying with a forceful stream of water or by using a soft-bristled car-washing brush attached to a hose. Although power washing is the most rapid and efficient means to clean siding, if not done properly the water could migrate behind the siding and damage sheathing, insulation and structural beams. It is always best to wash from the bottom up (to prevent streaking and staining) and to spray water downward or directly at the siding.

Mildew and stubborn stains may require more aggressive action by the use of cleaning solutions. First, however, it is always important to test the cleaner at an inconspicuous site to make certain that does not cause damage.

Owens Corning, a leading vinyl siding manufacturer, has recommended a cleaning solution that can be made at home. Mix 1/3 cup powdered detergent (such as Fab or Tide) and 2/3 cup powdered household cleaner (such as Spic & Span) in one gallon of water. Apply the cleaning solution with the soft-bristled brush and rinse.

If mildew is the major problem, mix 1/3 cup non-ammoniated household detergent, 2/3 cup trisodium phosphate (TSP, sold at paint stores) and one quart of chlorine bleach in one gallon of water. (WARNING: Never mix chlorine bleach with ammoniated cleaners because a dangerous gas is produced.) Apply the cleaning solution with the soft-bristled brush and rinse.

Source: Gene Austin, Vinyl Siding: Do's and Don'ts of Cleaning, The Record (Bergen County, NJ), June 24, 2004