

PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST
RATINGS FROM
OUR LABS

The Top Laundry Detergents

See how well 65 liquids,
pods, and sheets
handled the toughest
stains out there.

by Keith Flamer

- 1.**
✓ **PERSIL
PROCLEAN
STAIN FIGHTER**
21 cents per load
84 OVERALL
SCORE
- 2.**
**TIDE HYGIENIC
CLEAN HEAVY DUTY
10X POWER PODS**
33 cents per load
78 OVERALL
SCORE
- 3.**
**EARTH BREEZE
LIQUIDLESS
ECO SHEETS**
40 cents per load
29 OVERALL
SCORE

YOU MAY HAVE noticed the tsunami of new products lining the shelves of your supermarket's laundry detergent aisle. The packages promise to work wonders on every laundry challenge—and even to protect the environment. These detergents come in more forms than ever, too. In addition to liquids and pods, there are now paperlike detergent sheets (or “strips”). And you’ll find laundry “enhancers,” including prewash stain removers, whiteners, and scent boosters (see “Laundry Extras

You Can Skip,” on page 20).

To help you sort through the options, Consumer Reports has tested 65 liquids, pods, and sheets to see how well they handle tough stains, including grass, chocolate—even blood.

What Works, What Doesn't

The winners? Liquid detergents, which consistently top our ratings. “When it comes to removing the tough stains we use in our tests, the best liquid detergents outperform the best pods. Detergent sheets have a long way to go before they even equal the lowest-rated

liquid and pod detergents,” says Rich Handel, CR's laundry expert.

We also found that some of the terms you see on detergent packages—“stain fighting” or “oxi,” for example—don't always mean much. Some so-called stain-fighting detergents don't fight stains well at all, while others live up to their names admirably. Your smartest move: Rely on our ratings (see page 22) rather than on cleansing claims on the products. “Our cleaning scores aren't based on labeling—they're developed from comparative testing on fabrics with standardized stains,” Handel says.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT DETERGENT STYLE (LIQUIDS, PODS, OR SHEETS)



THE LIQUIDS ARE BETTER

Liquid detergents make up the largest share of the detergent market, which is why CR tests more of them than pods or sheets.

The top two liquids in our ratings—*Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release*, 28 cents per load, and *Persil ProClean Stain Fighter*, 21 cents per load—do a great job of tackling stains. Both aced our tests for removing body oil, dirt, salad dressing, and chocolate, and both worked well when we pretreated stains with them. (Our testing reveals that dabs of liquid detergent can act as an effective stain remover, as good as or better than special stain remover sprays.)

Keep in mind that using more detergent in each load does not necessarily get your clothes cleaner. In fact, adding too much can leave a residue on your laundry and in your machine that does not get rinsed away.

How much detergent you should use to get your clothes clean depends on load size, the cycle you're using, the water temperature, and the detergent itself. To avoid using too much detergent, start with the smallest amount specified on the label. You can always add more next time if you don't get the results you want.



WHAT'S GOOD (AND BAD) ABOUT PODS

Detergent pods encase concentrated cleaning agents in a pouch of polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), a nontoxic plastic polymer designed to dissolve in water, dispensing ingredients at specific points in the cycle. Introduced by Tide maker Procter & Gamble in 2012, the convenient, no-need-to-measure format proved popular, and other brands launched their own versions.

Are pods as effective as they are easy to use? Actually, no. Half of the pods we tested clean well, but none stand up to the top liquids in our ratings. The best pods, *Tide Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty*

10X Power Pods, 33 cents per load, earned high scores in six of our seven stain tests (just don't bank on them to get out every coffee stain).

There are other cons: Pods don't allow you to pretreat stains before laundering, and it's harder to adjust dosing for different-sized loads. If you don't follow the directions correctly, the pod may not fully dissolve and could leave streaks of detergent on your clothes. Also, colorful pods can be mistaken for candy, so CR does not recommend them for households with children or cognitively impaired adults.

CAN ECO-FRIENDLY DETERGENTS GET CLOTHES CLEAN?

IF YOU'RE WORRIED that doing laundry may harm the environment, detergent sheets (see below) aren't your only option. Some liquids and pods promise nontoxic or

"free & clear" formulas—sometimes free of parabens, phosphates, bleaches, dyes, and fragrances—designed to be less polluting, as well as gentler on your skin.

But you may have to compromise on cleaning power. "Cleaning agents in 'sustainable' detergents tend to not be as effective as those in traditional formulas," says Handel. In our ratings (on page 22), "sensitive" formulas range from the relatively high-scoring **Persil ProClean**



Sensitive Skin, 37 cents per load (shown above), which proved excellent at cleaning body oils, salad

dressing, and chocolate, to **Arm & Hammer Sensitive Skin**, 12 cents per load, near the bottom of our liquid ratings (body oil was the only stain it removed well).

CR tested five popular liquid detergents—both standard and "gentle" formulas—for toxic substances considered harmful to human health and the environment. Those included the suspected carcinogen 1,4-dioxane; heavy metals arsenic, cadmium, and lead; phthalates, which can

cause reproductive and neurological problems; and the environmental pollutant phosphorus. None of the detergents had alarming levels of these substances. We detected no toxic chemical traces in the "free & clear" detergents, including **Seventh Generation Free & Clear Liquid Sensitive Skin**, 17 cents per load, and **All Free Clear Stainlifter with Odor Relief**, 17 cents per load. You can also look for the EPA Safer Choice label as you shop.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT DETERGENT STYLE *continued*



THE TROUBLE WITH SHEETS

Sometimes called detergent strips, these paperlike sheets of concentrated detergent dissolve in the wash. Because they come in a box—not a plastic container like liquids or pods—the companies behind Earth Breeze, Ecos, Kind Laundry, and Tru Earth tout them as "eco-friendly."

They also point out that the packages' smaller size and weight cuts down on emissions generated by transporting the conventional heavy bottles and boxes to market.

These manufacturers often claim that the sheets are hypoallergenic because they're free of parabens,

phosphates, bleaches, and dyes, which can irritate the skin.

Eco-friendly and gentle or not, detergent sheets fell short in our tests. Their stain-removal performance ranged mostly from mediocre to poor, with coffee stains a particular weakness. The top-rated product in our ratings, **Earth Breeze Liquidless Eco Sheets**, 40 cents per load, has an Overall Score of 29—about the same as the worst liquid or pod detergent we evaluated. At between 20 cents and 40 cents per load, sheets are roughly the same price as liquids or pods.

LAUNDRY EXTRAS YOU CAN SKIP

DON'T BE FOOLED by the labels with big promises: Some additives don't make your clothes any cleaner. In fact, that pleasant scent or soft touch could leave skin-irritating residue on everything you wash.



STAIN REMOVER SPRAYS AND STICKS can be effective pretreatments. But our pros say that a little laundry detergent applied directly to a stain (see "How to Remove Tough Stains," on facing page) works just as well (and costs less).

FABRIC SOFTENERS coat laundry with electrically charged compounds that neutralize static cling and make fibers feel soft and fluffy. But they can reduce flame resistance in kids' sleepwear, leave a waxy residue that will negate the

sweat-wicking properties of workout clothes, and lead to mold growth in washing machines.

WHITENERS AND BRIGHTENERS use blue-white dyes and optical brighteners to reduce yellowing and fading. But many detergents (like **Tide Ultra Oxi**, 27 cents per load) already include whitening agents that may improve brightness.

SCENT BOOSTERS may add a scent or eliminate odors. But these pricey fragrances can be allergens.

HOW TO REMOVE TOUGH STAINS

THE LONGER A STAIN REMAINS, the harder it may be to remove—so try to treat a spot as soon as possible. Start by determining your stain type. Grease? Dirt? Makeup? Use the tips below to remove five common stains. Fabrics matter too: Cotton and linen may require pretreatment prior to laundering, while a regular trip through the wash could do the trick for synthetics. You can use a stain remover spray or dab on a bit of detergent. Both are effective.



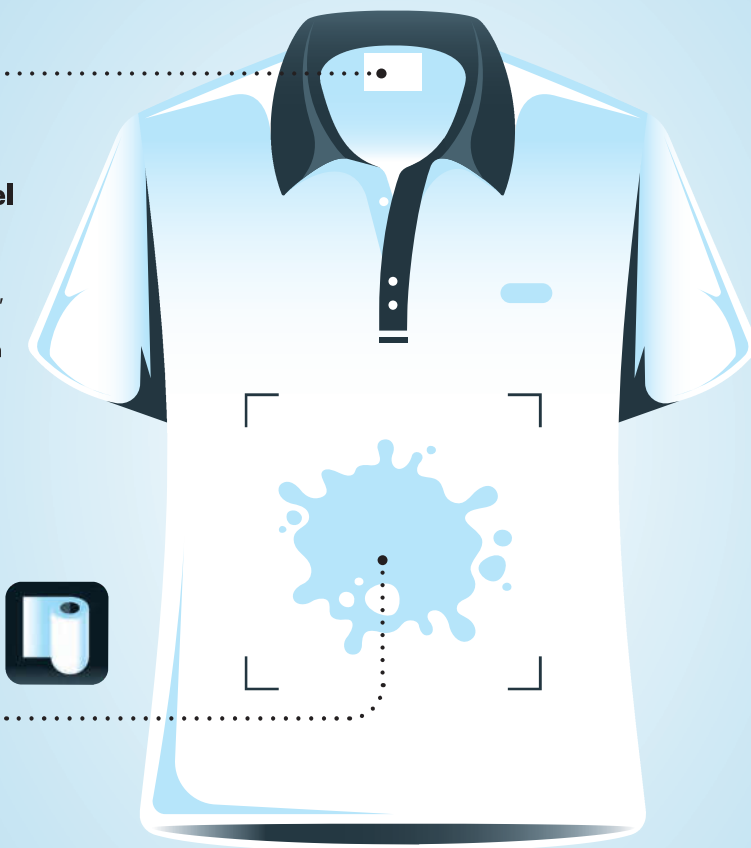
1 Check the care label

Review care labels before treating or washing clothes. Some stains require hot water, which may not be suitable for certain fabrics. And "dry clean only" means you should avoid the washer altogether.



2 Blot the spot

Use a paper towel or clean white cloth to dab up messes. Blot stains from the outer edges toward the center.



3 Dab with detergent

To pretreat, add a little of a top-rated detergent directly onto the stain, then rub it in (or gently scrub with a soft-bristled toothbrush). Finally, launder in your machine.



4 Be patient

Keep repeating these steps until the stain is gone. If you toss the item into the dryer, the heat may set the stain.

5 SOLUTIONS FOR STUBBORN STAINS



Oil & Grease

Blot first. Then pretreat with detergent (dab it on) or stain remover spray; launder in the warmest water safe for the fabric. Repeat steps as needed before drying (heat sets these stains).



Wine, Coffee & Tea

Flush the back of the fabric with cold water, then rub detergent or stain remover spray into the stain. Wash with the warmest water the label recommends.



Ketchup & Tomato Sauce

Red tomato pigment acts as a dye and any oil (like in pasta sauce) saturates and sticks to fabric fibers. Saturate the area with detergent. Wash in cold water.



Makeup


Makeup's long-lasting pigments and emollients make it tough to remove. Blot with acetone-based nail polish remover, then try a store-bought cleaning solvent, such as Alba or Goo Gone.



Grass, Dirt & Mud

Brush off any dry dirt or mud. Apply detergent directly to the stain and rub gently. Wait 5 minutes, then launder in the warmest water indicated for the fabric.

Ratings ➤ **On the Spot** Even chocolate and salad dressing are no match for the top laundry detergents in our tests. And the best will get the job done well in hard water, too.

Brand + Product		Overall Score	Price Per Load	Test Results							
				Body oil	Dirt	Salad dressing	Coffee	Chocolate	Grass	Blood	Hard water
LIQUIDS											
✓	Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release	84	28c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓	Persil ProClean Stain Fighter	84	21c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇
✓	Tide Ultra Oxi	83	27c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
✓	Tide Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X	80	44c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓	Persil ProClean + Oxi Power	79	30c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓	Persil ProClean Odor Fighter	78	29c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓	Persil ProClean Original	78	19c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
✓	Tide Ultra Oxi with Odor Eliminators	76	24c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
✓	Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Liquid	76	11c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
✓	Persil ProClean Sensitive Skin*	75	37c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide Eco-Box Original	74	19c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆
	Tide Plus Bleach Alternative	72	27c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide HE Turbo Clean	70	23c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Free & Clear*	69	11c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide Hygienic Clean 10X Heavy Duty Free/Nature*	67	22c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆
	Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Ultimate Clean	67	11c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	OxiClean High Def Liquid	67	15c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	All Free Clear Stainlifter with Odor Relief*	65	17c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide Plus Coldwater Clean HE	64	27c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Presto! Premium Liquid	64	15c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide Free & Gentle Liquid*	62	21c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
	All Oxi Stainlifters	61	17c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Purex 4 in 1 with Clorox 2 for Colors	56	11c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Arm & Hammer Plus OxiClean Odor Blasters	55	11c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Tide PurClean	54	28c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Great Value (Walmart) Original Clean Ultimate Fresh HE	54	9c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Seventh Generation Free & Clear Liquid Sensitive Skin*	54	17c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Cheer Colorguard	53	22c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	All Stainlifters Original	49	10c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	All Small & Mighty Super Concentrated	49	9c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	All Stainlifters Free & Clear*	45	14c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Era Active Stainfighter	43	34c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Purex 4 in 1 Mountain Breeze	43	22c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
	Arm & Hammer Clean Burst	41	10c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Price Per Load	Test Results							
			Body oil	Dirt	Salad dressing	Coffee	Chocolate	Grass	Blood	Hard water

PODS/PACKS

Tide Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X Power Pods	78	33c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Tide Ultra Oxi with Odor Eliminators Pods	74	56c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Tide Plus Hygienic Clean 10X Heavy Duty Power Pods Free/Nature [†]	71	57c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Tide Pods Ultra Oxi 4in1	70	42c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
Tide Pods Plus Febreze 4in1	70	35c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
Gain Flings!	67	56c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇
Tide Pods 3-in-1 Coldwater Clean	67	33c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆
Tide Pods Plus Downy 4in1	65	35c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Premium Laundry Detergent Pacs	63	12c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Persil ProClean Discs + Oxi Power	59	32c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆
Persil ProClean Discs Stain Fighter	59	32c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
Persil ProClean Discs Original	58	41c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇
Seventh Generation Free & Clear Packs Sensitive Skin*	55	32c	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇
All Mighty Pacs Oxi Free & Clear*	53	62c	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Great Value (Walmart) Original Clean Ultimate Fresh Pacs	53	19c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬆
Tide Pods Simply Plus Oxi	53	43c	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Arm & Hammer Plus OxiClean 5-in-1 Power Paks	33	30c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Arm & Hammer 4-in-1 Power Paks	32	16c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇

SHEETS/STRIPS

Earth Breeze Liquidless Eco Sheets	29	40c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Sheets Liquidless Laundry Detergent Sheets	26	30c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Ecos Liquidless Laundry Detergent Squares*	22	36c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Kind Laundry Laundry Detergent Sheets	19	27c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Ecowise Clean Laundry Detergent Sheets	19	20c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Tru Earth Eco Strips	11	39c	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇

> Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/detergent](https://www.consumerreports.org/detergent).

HOW WE TEST: We launder fabric swatches that are stained with body oil, dirt, salad dressing, coffee, grass, and blood. Using cool water, we wash swatches in two identical washers

with each detergent, then allow the swatches to air-dry. (We also run tests using very hard water—300 ppm—to see how well the detergents work under those conditions.) Testers use

a colorimeter, a device that measures color intensity, to see how much of the stain remains on each dry swatch, compared with stained swatches that have been laundered using only water.

*For sensitive skin. The manufacturer claims that this product contains no dyes or detergents.



SCAN THIS QR CODE

See how we test laundry detergents.

Copyright of Consumer Reports is the property of Consumer Reports, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.