

How to clean window blinds fast without creating slime or clouds of dust

Cleaning the window blinds one of those pain-in-the-butt chores I sometimes feel compelled to do, disgusted sneer on my face all the while.

I've always groped my way through it with a roll of dry paper towels and a wad of wet ones on hand. Turns out, I've been cleaning blinds wrong all these years.

After reading some great tips online from half a dozen sites, I set out to try them, adding some of my own adaptations along the way because I just can't help myself.



All told, the entire process of cleaning one set of Venetian (horizontal) blinds didn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes, and I'm happy enough with the results to ignore the blinds for the rest of spring. If you're also planning to vacuum the room, do the blinds and other dusting first, and save the hoovering for last. Here's what I did.

Pick up all your junk first

Obvious as this may be, do *not* skip this step. Dust and dirt will rain down on any clothing, papers or other items on the floor under the window, even a fine layer. Put your stuff on the desk or bed, or better yet put it all away.

If the blinds are really dirty, consider covering your face

The layer of crud on my blinds was light enough this time that I wasn't too worried about inhaling too many particles. You can help protect your lungs by donning a face mask (a touchy subject in these times) or wrapping your nose and mouth in a scarf -- you can always throw it in the wash when you're done.



Clean dry, not wet

My biggest mistake has been attempting to clean my plastic blinds wet, then follow up with dry paper towels. This creates a muddy mess that smears around the dirt. Damp paper towels do pick up much of the scum, and seem to help dissolve some of the dust in hard-to-reach corners. But when cleaned dry first, the work went faster and more effectively.

Here's an exception: if your window blinds are heavily soiled, you may need an opposite plan of action than the one I outline below, like combinations of dish soap, vinegar and water solutions, or even taking your blinds down from the window and washing them in the tub. Wood blinds may also need a more specialized treatment.

Secret weapon: Bring out the vacuum cleaner

Yes, you can use a duster or microfiber cloth (more below), but the breakthrough method for me has been using the small duster attachment (the one with the brushes) on my vacuum cleaner. It makes quick work of a task that would normally take me at least three times longer when done by hand.

Vacuums of all sizes may have such attachments, which clip or pop on to a rod or hose.



Clean in a zigzag pattern, one section at a time

The general recommendation is to angle the blinds so you start with the concave part first (the side that usually collects more dust) and move from top to bottom so the dust will fall downward, and you can sweep it up as you go along.

This makes good sense, but to reduce pacing back and forth while taking things row by row, I worked my way down vertical section by section, divided by those support strings running the length of most blinds.

Pick a side, top right or top left. Starting with one vertical section at a time, vacuum the top slat in one direction, say from left to right. When you reach the end of the slat, drag the vacuum down to the slat below, so you're starting on the right side of that slat and working your way left. When you're done with the second slat, drop the vacuum's duster head down to the third, picking up on the left side. When you've finished a section, start again from the top of the next one.

In the end, you're following a zigzag pattern that keeps the work moving along quickly, from section to section.

Now do the other side

When you're done with the one side, turn the rod to tilt the blinds the other direction and do it all over again. The dust was lighter on this side, so I wound up breaking the "rules" and vacuumed each section from top to bottom, working my way across in long swipes. (But you get cosmic brownie points for doing it the "right" way.)

Microfiber, socks and dusters work, too

If you don't have a vacuum cleaner or a duster attachment, or just prefer to use something else, microfiber cloth seems to be the most universally accepted method. You can also use a fluffy duster on a wand or a specialized tool, such as a mini microfiber blinds duster, that has finger-like appendages to really get in there.

I saw some DIY suggestions to make your own blinds duster by rubber banding sponges or microfiber cloths to the interior of a pair of kitchen tongs (one on each side), clamping it over a blind, and sliding it along to collect dust. Clever! You could even stick your hand in a sock, but that seems like more manual labor than I like.



Get the rest of the grime out

When I inspected the blinds in the light, I was satisfied enough with my efforts, but the grime in and on the windowsill nagged at me. I used the vacuum's dusting attachment to suck in as many particles as possible. Next I went for the dry paper towel because old habits die hard and I didn't feel like sacrificing a microfiber cloth, then I used the damp paper towel to get into the corners and dissolve more dirt. Not a perfect technique, but I got enough out to move on with my day.

Vacuum the floor, and then clean the brushes

The last couple of steps involve using your standing, shop or handheld vacuum to pick up the dust particles hanging out on the floor, especially if you've got carpet. You can either shake or wipe off the bristles of the duster attachment over the trash to clean them or toss the whole attachment in the sink with some liquid handwash soap like I did, to soak a bit before rinsing and air drying.

Reward yourself

Take a load off. You deserve it. I celebrated by writing this article while reclining on the couch.

For more household cleaning tips, learn the easy way to clean your shower head, keep mold from growing in your washing machine and sanitize your toothbrush from errant fecal particles (gross).

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