

# Cleaning Screens

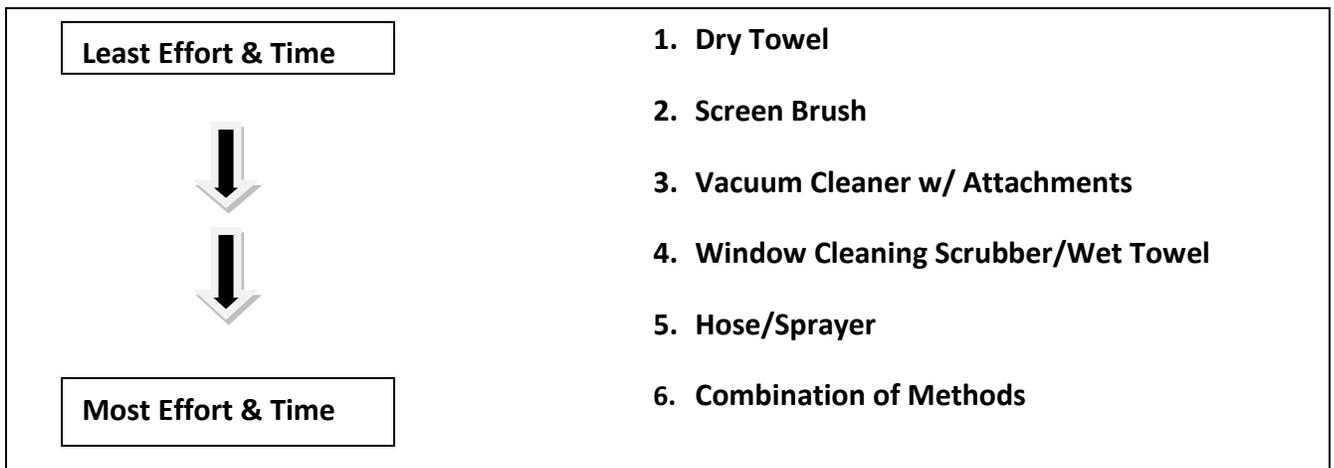
It is easy to overlook the role that screens play in our everyday lives. After all, screens are the thin barrier that keeps undesirables out, while allowing a fresh clean breeze to pass through. Just like windows, clean screens are essential to a healthy living space, and should be cleaned on a regular basis. Mastering the method that proves best for your situation will ensure comfort throughout the year.

Screens can vary on the type of material they are constructed of; so the most effective cleaning method can also vary. I recommend using a 'trial and error' or 'compare and contrast' approach to determine the cleaning method that achieves the best results for your situation.

Before we discuss method options, you should have a plan on where you will be cleaning your screens. When cleaning your screens inside, use a drop towel to catch the mess. This will save you the time and effort of having to cleaning up *after* you clean up – the screens.

Prior to choosing a method of cleaning your screens, you will need to need to analyze their current condition. This will give you a better idea of which cleaning method will work best for you.

## Methods For Cleaning Screens



## **General Rule of Thumb:**

New screens or screens that appear to be relatively clean may only require a quick touch up with a dry towel or screen brush – Methods 1 and 2.

Screens that appear dirty often require a compare and contrast approach through trial and error to fine-tune exactly what method provides the best results. If Method 2 is insufficient, attempt Methods 2-6 until you attain acceptable results.

When screens are coated with dirt and debris, such as cottonwood, pollen, leaves or grass, a combination of methods is often the solution. You may find using a dry towel or wet towel and a vacuum cleaner is the best method, or using a garden hose/sprayer to clean the screen combined with a dry towel is what achieves success.

### **Method #1: Dry Towel**

Based on the principle that ‘less is more’, using a dry towel to clean your screens is often the fastest and most efficient cleaning method, especially compared to using a hose or sprayer. I prefer a used cleaned Huck towel in situations with new screens or screens that require a light cleaning or a quick touch up.

What cleaning with a dry towel, make certain to fold the towel and hold it in a manner that always protects your hands from unforeseen dangers such as splinters, clips, nails or staples. Start cleaning on the dirtiest side first. Keeping your eyes looking ahead of your hand, lightly brush the screen area, going in one direction, not back and forth. Once both sides have been cleaned, tap or flick your finger lightly on the screen to help remove remaining tiny debris that still lingers on the screen.

### **Method #2: Screen Brush**

Specifically designed to clean all types of screens, a screen brush is an affordable and durable investment that does all the dirty work while keeping your hands safe and clean. Although Big Box stores and hardware stores offer brushes, make sure to purchase and use a brush that is safe to use on screens. Unlike most hand brooms and brushes – that tend to puncture and damage the screen, a brush designed specifically to clean screens performs safe and quick work that maximizes results and value. Similar to using a dry towel, use your screen

brush on the dirtiest side first – sweeping in one direction, not back and forth. Clean the entire screen from top to bottom, moving from one side to the other. Tap or flick any remaining debris off from the screen and assess. Was this method up to your standards?

### **Method #3: Vacuum Cleaner with Attachments**

Provided you have the time and are willing to put forth the effort, a vacuum cleaner with attachments can be a suitable method to efficiently clean screens. Many of my current clients opt to clean their own screens based on their success using a vacuum cleaner, they claim that experimenting with the different attachments was the process to find the exact one that worked the best. My response is simple – if they are happy with the outcome then I am happy. Use trial and error to determine if this method is a worthy option.

### **Method #4: Scrubber/Wet Towel**

Window cleaning scrubbers (or wands) can also be used to clean screens. If the previous three dry methods have not been sufficient, it is time to try a wet cleaning option. Scrubbers are nice because they make fast work and cover large areas with minimal effort.

They also enable you to keep your hands safe and away from the frictional demands of the cleaning process. With that said, I have occasionally experienced situations while wetting down a screen with a scrubber or wet towel where it actually leaves the screen looking worse than before I attempted to clean it. Based on the concept of ‘less is more’, you may have screens that clean up better without adding moisture to the equation. I have deemed that when soapy water is added to certain screens, it lingers on the screen material and is hard to remove; thus, the screen appears streaky and blotchy. The same can be said when using a wet towel. More times than not, a Huck towel that is saturated can be the best method, but there are times when it can leave a screen looking worse than prior to cleaning it. This is where you have to experiment using trial and error then live and learn from the results. Similar to using a dry towel, take precaution when using a wet towel by folding and applying it in a manner that protects your hands from any dangers involved in the cleaning process. Move in one direction to clean and lift dirt and debris from the screen in a consistent pattern from top to bottom. Try to avoid moving back and forth on the screens surface, as this tends to spread the dirt and debris around *more* than lifting it free from the tiny holes that make up the screen surface.

## **Method #5: Hose/Sprayer**

If the previous methods have not been adequate, or if the screens are extremely dirty, a garden hose/sprayer is a possible but less preferred option. Some of my clients opt to clean their screens by hosing them down outside and then letting them air dry. If you have access to a hose with running water and are willing to put forth the effort, this may be an ample option for you. Another popular variation of this method is to hose down the frames and screen material and then proceed to dry them off with numerous small towels or a larger bath towel. Some people swear by this method and are convinced they have found this is what works the best for their situation.

## **Method #6: Combining Methods**

Through trial and error, you may find that using a combination of methods is the most efficient way to clean your screens. For example, you could try using a wet towel followed by a dry towel, or a saturated scrubber application that allows the screens to air-dry before you put them on or store them for away for the season. I have had success on several occasions using a screen brush to remove grass and leaves combined with a wet towel application to provide the finishing touch. If one method on its own fails to deliver satisfaction, then try a combination of methods to ultimately succeed.

## **Summary/Bullet Points**

- Screen types vary; thus, cleaning methods vary.
- Use a strategy of Trial and Error, and Compare and Contrast.
- Start with easier, dry methods. Analyze and proceed.
- Clean top to bottom and from side to side.
- Cleaning technique should move in one direction, not back and forth.
- Work safe by concentrating on keeping your eyes ahead of your work.
- Not all screens clean up the same. Experiment and fine-tune.

## Other Considerations

1. Replace when needed – Radical agents can oxidize on the screens surface over time making the cleaning process more challenging. And in turn, the screens appearance looks uncleaned and unacceptable. Other reasons to consider replacing your screen can include hail or pet damage, multiple open or patch holes, stains, or perhaps it is in such rough shape or ‘long in the tooth’ that it is simply time to replace it. For only a few bucks, you can get a new screen that functions and looks great and will be easier to clean in the future.
2. Cleanliness is Godliness – A great way to keep your living space healthy and clean is to use a drop towel during the screen cleaning process. This allows you to control, direct and contain any dirt and debris from the screen onto your accepting drop towel. I like the convenience and ease of using a drop towel on projects that require moving from one area to another. I also recommend them on projects that entail cleaning all your screens at one time in the same place. They protect and pad your floors and carpets while catching any undesirables during the cleaning process.
3. Savvy Screen Selection – To enhance the host of a clean window, you may choose to selectively remove certain screens. This enables you to enjoy a clear view out of your favorite window or windows that you rarely, if ever, open for use during the year. Many of my clients choose to not put a screen on certain windows for a multitude of reasons. Keep this option in mind if you haven’t applied it already to your situation.
4. System For Screen Success – A great way to stay organized while minimizing confusion, particularly on projects that involve large numbers of screens, is to use a labeling system. This enables you to quickly identify what screen belongs to each corresponding window. I prefer to use a dark, permanent marker to label the very top of the screen. Avoid the mistake of labeling your screen in a place that is visible when looking at it in your window. I like to label screens with abbreviations of the room it belongs in and the directions it faces while looking out. For example, if you have a screen located in the Family Room that faces the East, label the very top with FR – East for a fast and accurate designation. At the very least, construct some kind of system that works for you. Having an accurate labeling system can really pay off on projects that have screens that look to be the same size when yet in reality, they are slightly smaller or larger than they appear.

A good system saves time and effort while alleviating un-needed confusion and frustration.

5. Storage Tips – For one reason or another, screens are easy to misplace or lose (leaving all the other screens sad and lonely☹). Keep yourself and your screens happy by organizing them all together in one area located somewhere that is convenient yet attainable. This keeps them out of sight and out of the way while still allowing you easy access as needed. I like to cover my screens in storage with an old bed sheet. This provides ample protection and helps to keep them cleaner for next time.

## **Final Thoughts**

Establishing and implementing the proper screen cleaning method will ultimately make you a screen-cleaning master. You now possess the system for success to win the war on cleaning your screens. Poised with knowledge and confidence, you will be able to ‘strut your stuff’ at home, your office or your lakeside cabin. Take your time, work smart and smile knowing that you can enjoy a lifetime of clean screens *whenever, wherever and forever.*



**Thank you. Enjoy!**