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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, July 25, 1933
U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "Saving Colored Clothes." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U.S.D.A.

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Say what you like about the sorrows of men, most of us women have experienced certain tragedies of our own that men just don't know anything about. For example, most of us women have been through the tragedy of the favorite new dress ruined after its first laundering--the dress with a color that ran when we never expected it would. Once that color had streaked the dress, nothing would remedy matters. Fortunately, this tragedy was much more common some years ago than it is today, for in recent times manufacturers have made an effort to use fast dyes. Also, many of us housekeepers are wiser about our shopping than we used to be. A good many wise women never buy a piece of goods for a wash dress, without taking home a sample first and trying it out to see if the color runs in water. Just a case of safety first to save future trouble. Of course, when you buy ready-made garments this testing the fabric in advance isn't possible. But you can look to see if the dress has a label and if the label guarantees the color as fast. Or you can ask the dealer. He may give you his word that the dress will wash satisfactorily. Anyway, whenever you shop for colored wash goods or wash garments, you'll be wise to inquire about this matter of fast color before you buy.

But suppose that you do find yourself with a wash dress that runs. Can you set the color? Once upon a time we believed that we could set certain dyes either with salt or vinegar. But the textile specialists now shake their heads at the idea. They say that if a color isn't fast to begin with, neither a rinse in brine nor in vinegar water will hold it. But they say you can often prevent much running by washing the garment in cool or cold water and by washing and drying it so fast that the dye hardly has time to run.

The way you launder any garment has a lot to do with saving the color. If you feel a bit doubtful about that red cotton print or that yellow linen or that figured silk, use the greatest care the first time you launder it. Make a thick suds of mild soap in cool water. Wash quickly, squeezing out the dirt. Then rinse in cool water. Now squeeze out every bit of water you can. Then roll the dress between Turkish towels for a few minutes. The towels will absorb the moisture quickly. Hang the dress in a breeze where it will dry rapidly. An electric fan will help. Of course, never hang colored fabrics in the sun. Press with a warm iron as soon as the material is dry enough. Sometimes you can iron the dress just as soon as you take it out of the towels.

Now some of the "nevers" about washing clothes with colors that tend to run. Never sprinkle and roll them up for ironing. Never wash them in hot water. Never let them soak in water. Never hang them up wet enough to drip and streak. By the way, here's a point I almost forget to mention. When you roll the dress between two towels, better lay a third towel up inside to keep the front and back sections of the dress from coming in contact and possibly staining each other.

Haste doesn't make waste in washing colored garments. In fact, speed often saves the dress. If you work fast enough, the dye won't have a chance to do much damage. And if you use cold water for washing, you won't encourage the dye to start running.

All garments, either colored or white, last longer and launder more successfully if they aren't too soiled when they go into the washtub. Very soiled garments take a lot of scrubbing, a lot of soap, etc. That means wear on the fabric and possible damage to color. Also washing very soiled garments takes time and cuts down the speed of laundering, so important in saving color. For example, if you wash Bobby's little colored play suits before they get too soiled or stained, they'll wash easier and more quickly, they'll last longer, and they'll keep their looks longer. The same holds true for your gingham aprons and your colored house dresses and your smocks. The same holds true for household pieces, like sheets and towels.

If you want proof, ask anyone in the commercial laundry business. Laundries have their troubles with pieces that have become too soiled. They report that dish towels, ready for the laundry anyway, get put into use for general mopping purposes in the kitchen. Imagine that! And they report that some people use soiled napkins to wipe up tables or cutlery before sending them to the wash. Yes, and in hotels careless guests often use good linen supply towels to wipe off their shoes. Enough to shock any thrifty housekeeper! It's just this extra soil that means short life for these pieces. The laundry has to use drastic methods to get the material clean. And that soon wears it out. So remember, if you believe in saving fabrics, don't use a good towel to wipe off the automobile or dust the piano just because that towel is ready to go to the wash anyway. And don't wipe off the kitchen table with the dish towels, just because you are about to send them to the laundry.

And don't forget that cold water and quick work may prevent tragedies resulting from colored clothes that run.

Next week we'll discuss some more fabric-saving ideas. Tomorrow we'll talk about different ways to use your garden tomatoes.

