Home Repair Resource center

HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

CLEANING CONCRETE

Removing oil stains and brightening old concrete

It's incredible that something as hard as concrete can be so absorbent – but, let someone park an old oil-leaking car on your driveway, you'll be left with a large unsightly stain. While it's almost impossible to remove such stains to the point where you recapture that original white concrete appearance, there are steps you can take to remove most of the discoloration.

FRESH OIL SPILLS

1. Attack a fresh oil spill immediately, sopping up as much of the oil as you can with dry rags or paper towels.
2. Then, sprinkle a layer of kitty litter or sawdust over the area to soak up the remainder.
3. Sweep up the sawdust or litter, and then mix a strong solution of **trisodium phosphate** and hot water (1/2 cup of TSP to one gallon of water).
4. Scrub the area with an old broom or with a scrub brush mounted on a long handle, so you can stand upright while you work the cleaner into the concrete.
5. Then, flush the surface with water.

OLD GREASE BUILD-UP

For a thick build-up of old grunge and grease, scrape up the thick stuff with a putty knife and apply a solvent cleaner like **SWAB™** concrete cleaner by GUNK (available at car parts stores) to get most of the stain out. Follow that by scrubbing with the TSP solution to remove the solvent residue, and finish by flushing with water.

CLEANING LARGE AREAS

To clean large areas of concrete, a number of things can be done. One is to scrub the concrete with a diluted solution of **muriatic acid** (one cup acid to three cups of water). Let the acid set for a few minutes, and then flush the area well with water. The acid will "etch" or remove some of the surface of the concrete – along with any rust marks and tannic stains from leaves – leaving a whiter surface.

> **CAUTION: MURIATIC ACID**
>
> This is not a job for an enclosed area, as the acid makes some nasty fumes, and you'll want to wear protective clothing.

PRESSURE WASHING

For a faster way to brighten the concrete, you can use a **pressure washer**, either with cleaners (used according to the manufacturer's instructions) or without cleaners for a no-chemical approach. Hold the spray nozzle about 8 to 12 inches above the block, so that the sharp water stream will not gouge the surface.

1. Start by angling the spray nozzle to the left, making passes over the surface going left-to-right.
2. Next, angle the spray nozzle to the right, and make overlapping passes going right-to-left. This technique will minimize streaking.

WHITENING THE SURFACE

After removing dirt and stains, you can follow the cleaning with another technique that will whiten the surface and hide some minor pitting. Keeping the concrete wet, sprinkle a layer of **Portland cement** (or **type "N" masonry cement**) and use a push broom to work it into the surface. Be sure to make the coating as even as you can to eliminate light and dark blotches.

ALWAYS FINISH WITH A SEALER

No matter what method you choose to clean your concrete, be sure to follow up by sealing the surface with a **masonry sealer**. The sealer will minimize new oil stains and damage from road salt.

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Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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