



Maintaining the Home

Refrigerator Care and Cleaning

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Locate the refrigerator away from heat sources like a range, radiator or sunny window.

Never run frost-free refrigerators with freezer compartments in unheated areas with an air temperature below 60 degrees unless specially designed for such conditions. When the air temperature goes below 60 degrees, the compressor runs less, keeping temperatures in the refrigerator compartment cold enough for fresh food. However, it is not cold enough in the freezer compartment to maintain food quality. At air temperatures below 40 degrees the compressor stops running, so the freezer compartment temperature rises and food thaws and spoils. Also, below 32 degrees, water melted during the automatic defrost cycle may freeze again and block air passages.

For seasonal homes with the heat left on at very low temperatures, or long winter vacations with the heat turned down in the home, remove all food, unplug, clean thoroughly, dry, and leave the door ajar so air can circulate. Be sure no child can get into empty refrigerator in your absence and become trapped! If you can't use up food, give it away or throw it away. Food that spoils in a refrigerator can create odors that may require discarding the refrigerator.

For short vacations, leave the refrigerator on but use up or discard perishable food, and if you have an ice maker, turn off the mechanism and water line following the directions in your manual.

If you have a chilled water dispenser and room temperatures may go below freezing while you are away, shut off the water and drain the water tank, following the directions in your appliance manual.

Do not cram the refrigerator so full that cold air can't circulate freely to chill food. Cover or wrap all foods stored, especially in frost-free models, to prevent drying out and the transfer of odors.

In models that need defrosting, do not use electric defrosters or other hot objects where they can touch plastic liners or parts—they could melt. Always unplug the refrigerator before defrosting. Never use sharp objects which could damage the evaporator coils.

Refrigerator Cleaning

Clean the refrigerator compartment regularly, even though it does not require defrosting. Turn it off and unplug it. Remove all food and removable interior parts. Wash with a solution of 1-2 tablespoons of baking soda in 1 quart of warm water. Rinse and wipe dry. Wash removable glass shelves and plastic parts in warm detergent solution, rinse and wipe dry. Do not put either glass or plastic in hot water; they may crack, especially if cold. Clean the door gasket with a detergent solution. Rinse and dry.

Occasionally clean the freezer compartment following the instructions that come with your refrigerator.

Wash the exterior of the cabinet with a detergent solution. Rinse and dry. A creamy appliance wax may be used occasionally to protect the painted exterior and make spots easier to wipe off.

Promptly wipe up spills in the refrigerator to avoid staining and odors.

Several of the plastics used for interior parts of the refrigerator are easily stained by berries, fruits and other colored foods and absorb and retain odors. Tightly wrap or cover stored foods and remove old foods before they spoil.

These plastics may soften at high temperatures so never put boiling or hot water in them. They also may be damaged by various household chemicals, so never use cleaning waxes, spray-on cleaners or concentrated chlorine bleach on them. Follow your manual directions for cleaning the different plastic drawers, shelves, etc. If you do not have a manual, be safe by using a mild detergent (a hand-dishwashing liquid) and lukewarm water solution, or a baking soda and water solution for cleaning. NEVER use abrasives like scouring powder or scouring pads, as these plastics are easily scratched.

Occasionally vacuum (or brush) dust from the condenser, usually under the front bottom grille (see manual for location and directions). Also at the same time, wash the plastic pan which collects water from automatic defrosting and replace it in the same location.

Unpleasant odors develop, either from improper storage of food or from spoilage.

This material was adapted from publications produced by Michigan State University. Michigan State publications can be found on the Web at <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod02/master02.html>.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

Interior Maintenance

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup
Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

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Furnace Care
Fireplace and Chimney Care

Cooling

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Air Conditioner
Ceiling Fans

Plumbing

Fixing Plugged Sink Drains
How to Unclog a Toilet
Repairing Dripping Faucets

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How to Replace a Fuse

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Choosing a Water Heater

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Dryer Care and Dryer Cleaning
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Range and Oven Care and Range Cleaning
Refrigerator Care and Refrigerator Cleaning
Small Electrical Appliance Care and Cleaning
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Ceramic Tile Floors Care and Cleaning
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Wallpaper Selection and Cleaning
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Selecting Fabric For Home Furnishings

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Exterior Walls, Windows, and Doors

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Indoor Water Conservation Tips
Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

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Dealing with Mold
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Hazardous Household Substances: Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects
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