

Disaster Relief

Cleaning Flood-Damaged Carpets and Rugs



When to Discard, Clean, or Call a Professional

When you have flood-damaged carpeting and rugs, your options depend on the source of the flooding. If floodwater is clean basement seepage or lawn runoff into a sub-basement, drying and cleaning is an easy decision. However, if sewage-contaminated floodwater has covered your carpeting, you will probably need to discard it for health and safety reasons. You can assume the water and the carpet contain infectious organisms. Throw rugs can usually be saved.

General Rules

- If wall-to-wall carpeting, large area rugs, and any rug with foam backing are flooded with contaminated water, discard the item. Except for valuable rugs, the time and expense of professional cleaning is generally not worth the effort or the health risk.
- If you are determined to salvage carpeting soaked with contaminated water, consult a professional cleaning company that services carpets at its own cleaning and drying facilities. A steam-cleaning (hot-water extraction) method is preferable.
- You can save wall-to-wall carpeting soaked by clean rainwater. Have it professionally cleaned or clean it using the directions below.
- You can usually clean throw rugs well enough in a washing machine.

Cleaning Rain-Soaked Carpets

Cleaning basement carpeting indoors is not a good idea in summer, because you are adding even more moisture to an already wet area. If the carpeting is installed with tack strips, you may be able to remove it and have it cleaned and reinstalled.

Padding is nearly impossible to clean, so replace it. If you can't remove the carpeting, dry it as quickly as possible to lessen growth of mildew. If possible, use a wet/dry vacuum system. A dehumidifier can help remove moisture from the air. Keep windows closed when using a dehumidifier.

- When the carpet is thoroughly dry, vacuum it.
- Shampoo and repeat the drying process. Keep in mind that most modern carpeting is made of nylon and should not be treated with bleach.
- Vacuum again.
- Here's a way you can reduce a musty smell:
 1. Sprinkle baking soda over the carpet, working it in with a broom or sponge mop.
 2. Leave the baking soda in the carpet overnight.
 3. Vacuum the baking soda out. Vacuum twice, moving back and forth in a different direction the second time.

Additional Resources

- Your county Extension agent
- Your local emergency government office
- American Red Cross
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

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