

# Removing rust stains

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(See non-toxic cleaners in the last paragraph, and Do Rust Cleaners Work?)

There has always been one basic chemical available for getting rust off about anything and that was Oxalic Acid. That was the active ingredient in the old petroleum jelly that we used to clean the rust off of all our old chrome car bumpers. The problem is that Oxalic Acid is also known as Lemon Salt.

Why is that a problem? Because Oxalic acid can be very corrosive and toxic in strong doses, and a bottle of crystals is a very large dose. Now with a great name like Lemon Salt, wouldn't you want to try it on a steak? Don't try that! It became harder and harder to locate this stuff until finally it is now only commonly available at the drug store, and often behind the prescription counter. When I asked my druggist if there was any other use for this chemical that justified it being in the drug store, he said no, just that because of it's name it was too dangerous to sell it without a lecture.

Second problem was that now there were no instructions as to how to mix it for different rust removal projects.

Finally someone put out a product that has several ingredients, including Oxalic Acid, specifically formulated for removing rust, and at this formulation level, it is no longer even corrosive for skin contact. Does it work? You bet it does. It will work on that rug in the trunk of the car, where you left the snow tracks or shovel too long, or on the rust in the sink. Just spray it on, let it sit a bit and rinse it off. If you look at the photo above, the entire carpet had rust marks but in just a couple of minutes I got the top half clean. It is called The Rust Gun.

There are other rust removal products that have shown up on the market, generally based on Phosphoric Acid, another good metal cleaner. Note that they are all acids, some stronger than others. Use them with caution and rinse well.

Both Oxalic Acid and Phosphoric Acid, if poured into a toilet bowl and left for a couple of hours will take off the orange brown stain that develops in toilets below the water line. Toilet Bowl Cleaner by Master Plumber is one such phosphoric acid based product that is easy to find in the stores -- and it does work but I wouldn't try this one on a carpet.

And for the non-toxic treatments...

The non-toxic cleaner to get that brown urine stain out of the toilet is simple household vinegar, the same stuff you use to clean the calcium out of the hot water kettle. Pour about a cup of vinegar into the toilet and let it sit 20 minutes. Then pour a cup of vinegar into your tea kettle and boil it to clean the kettle -- but now dump that hot vinegar into the toilet. About two minutes later you should be able to scrub out the brown stain with an ordinary toilet brush and a little elbow grease -- but no corrosive acids down the drain.

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