

CLEANING YOUR CRYSTAL

We are often asked for tips on how best to clean crystal.

I have heard of many different ways to clean crystal and tried most of them all, except the dishwasher – which I definitely wouldn't even attempt, let alone recommend as it is too abrasive. Just look at what a few cycles in the dishwasher does to your wine glasses.

Gloves or no gloves?

Some people prefer to wear gloves, others hate them. I have to say I am not that keen on them as I find they can be slippery and also sometimes get caught up in things like the seal's whiskers and pull them off. Just to be awkward I sometimes just wear one during the final stages of cleaning! That way I feel I can handle crystal safely in the ungloved hand, but also use the gloved hand to wipe off any fingerprints, giving me the best of both worlds.

To wash or not to wash?

You can, of course, clean your crystal by just wiping it with a cloth or gloves without washing it, but this can scratch the crystal if the pieces are very dusty. If you need to wash them, then the trick is not to soak them, and only immerse them in water for the briefest possible time.

What not to wash

I have 2 favoured methods of washing crystal – all this advice is for figurines only – and definitely not for your Swarovski jewellery, which should not be allowed to come into contact with liquid - ever! Don't follow this advice for crystal mesh items or for things like the jewelled, Myriad or Pointiage pieces either. Talking of jewellery, take your rings off! If your crystal items hit your rings, it can leave an impact mark, particularly on facet joins. Also remove any fabric embellishments from your pieces before cleaning.

Method One

This requires 2 bowls or buckets of warm-ish water, one with a small amount of Stergene or Fairy (original) liquid in it, and the other with just clear warm-ish water. You can, for extra security, place a towel at the bottom of each bowl just in case a piece of crystal should fall out of your hands as this will ensure a safer landing.

Holding one piece of crystal at a time – never, ever, handle more than one piece at a time – dip the crystal (not letting go at any time) into the soapy water and gently shake it around a little, where possible holding your free hand slightly below the piece. Remove from the water as soon as you can, and dip the piece straight into the non-soapy water and follow the same process.

To dry the crystal, sit it on trays covered with kitchen towels and allow it to dry naturally. Some people use a hairdryer set on a cool setting but there is a danger that this will knock the pieces over, or if it gets too hot, you risk weakening the glue joins. So, it is best to just leave them somewhere out of harm's way, and definitely out of the reach of pets, children and any strong draughts.

Method Two

My preferred method lessens the amount of time the crystal (and glue) is in contact with water,

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which has to be a good thing. This method is also much easier when working with larger pieces, but works equally well on the smaller ones.

For this you need to fill 2 plastic spray bottles (the type used for hairdressing or gardening) – one with warm-ish soapy water (as above), one with warm-ish clear water and spray the crystal rather than immersing it. Stand the crystal somewhere safe where it won't fall over, for example in a towel lined empty washing up bowl. Place your free hand behind the piece, just in case the impact of the spray makes it unsteady. Spray it with the soapy water, let that run down the piece for a few seconds, then spray with the clear water, allow the piece to dry on kitchen towels, as before. Sometimes this method can be rather embarrassing as if you haven't cleaned the crystal for a while, once you spray the soapy water on the piece, you can see the (now) dirty water running down the crystal piece!

Hints and tips

When throwing the water away - pour it gently through a sieve so that should anything have become detached during the process, it will be caught in the sieve rather than being lost forever.

To clean inaccessible areas such as in between the spines of your hedgehogs, you can use either the Swarovski cleaning kit which has a non-metal handled brush (to prevent scratches) or alternatively, use a great product called "the mushroom brush" from Lakeland, which is very soft and also doesn't scratch, or try an old blusher brush. Any water marks (or fingerprints) can be wiped away at the end of the process with gloves, a lint-free cleaning cloth or a soft white duster (again Lakeland sell these!)

For the real professionals - if you use distilled water instead of tap or mineral water, this will prevent watermarks occurring.

Good luck!!

Two final, very important points

Never use glass or chandelier cleaning fluids on your crystal – unless you are cleaning a solid piece – ie something without any glue joins. Unfortunately, the chemicals in all these products are very harsh and can weaken the glue and cause it to deteriorate.

Please don't ever entrust your crystal cleaning to someone else whether they offer to do it for free or whether they charge for this service. You would need to thoroughly inspect your crystal before it leaves you to be cleaned, and then thoroughly inspect it again on its return to ensure that no damage has been caused. You can't even security mark it to ensure it won't be swapped in the process, as those marks will come off during the cleaning process itself. Therefore, its best just to take your time and gradually clean your own items to avoid any nasty situations where your collection is being handled by a third party who may or may not be willing to own up to any loss or damage caused. Additionally, your crystal insurance will very likely be invalidated if your items are damaged or stolen while they are in the hands of a third party for this process to be undertaken. Even if you have accidental damage cover, that accidental damage cover generally only covers you and your immediate family.