

CARING FOR YOUR MIRROR

THE BEST WAY TO CARE FOR YOUR MIRROR OR MIRRORED CABINET

From water splashes and toothpaste to shaving foam and make-up, a bathroom mirror has to withstand a lot. If you want your bathroom to always look presentable, you could find yourself reaching for the cleaning cloth every day. But beware: glass cleaners, bathroom cleaners and many other household products are not suitable for mirrors. A mirror has a more sensitive surface than you might think and requires special care to avoid it falling victim to mirror rot over time.

WHAT IS MIRROR ROT?

Mirror rot! The name alone sounds like some kind of curse from a third-rate horror film. But what is mirror rot, or desilvering, exactly? Usually, the typical black spots first appear at the edge of the mirror then spread further into the mirror surface. How does it happen, though? First of all, it is important to understand how a mirror is constructed.

THE LAYERS OF A MIRROR

If you examine a mirror's structure in detail, you can see that it consists of several layers: first, a wafer-thin layer of silver is applied to a glass plate. This silver layer is the reason why a mirror reflects. The glass plate lets light through particularly well and is therefore ideally suited as a substrate material. And the type of glass can vary, too: the basic building blocks are quartz sand, lime, soda and recycled glass (cullet), but the ratio can differ. Mirrors can be made from crystal glass or, most frequently, float glass.

To ensure that the silver layer adheres well to the glass, silver nitrate, ammonia and glucose are used. Afterwards, the sensitive silver layer is protected with additional top layers of copper and tin or with a special lacquer.

MIRROR ROT DESTROYS THE SILVER LAYER

The edges of the mirror are ground with an edge grinder. However, this cannot completely prevent the silver coating from being exposed to environmental factors in these areas. If moisture or chemical substances penetrate from there, the silver layer is attacked, and a process is triggered that causes the black spots. The silver oxidises and turns into silver sulphide. To put it simply, the mirror tarnishes.

HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS DAMAGE MIRRORS

Many people like to use conventional glass cleaners to clean their mirrors, as they quickly produce a sparkling result. Bathroom cleaners are also often used. However, these cleaners are not at all suitable for mirrors, as the ingredients can penetrate the edge of the mirror and cause mirror rot. Scouring agents should also not be used under any circumstances because some of the ingredients are abrasive and will scratch the surface.



ACIDS DAMAGE THE MIRROR SURFACE

Cleaners containing acids, such as citric and acetic acid, should also not be used to clean a mirror's delicate surface. Acids attack the surface of the mirror, with the result that moisture can penetrate the mirror more quickly, encouraging mirror rot.

NEWSPAPER AND POTATOES DON'T WORK EITHER

And what about the environmentally friendly alternatives your grandmother used to use? Newspaper and potatoes are often used to clean windows. But, unfortunately, they are not an option for mirror cleaning either. The coarse newsprint will quickly leave scratches on the delicate mirror surface. In addition, the printing ink can settle in the silver layer of the mirror and damage it. The same applies to the starch from the potatoes. This can build up and gradually dull the mirror's surface. So neither is a good idea!

HIGH HUMIDITY ACCELERATES EDGE DESILVERING

If mirrors are exposed to high humidity for a long period of time, it can encourage desilvering at the open edges. This is because the moisture from a shower or a hot bath condenses on the mirror and penetrates the mirror edges to the silver layer. Ventilating the bathroom regularly and thoroughly helps with this. A heated mirror also prevents water from condensing on it. You can dry the mirror quickly with a soft cloth, too.

WATCH OUT FOR POLLUTANTS IN THE AIR

Many people don't know that drain cleaners, toilet tablets and nail polish remover also emit pollutants that can accelerate mirror rot. It is therefore better not to store these substances near the mirror and particularly not in a mirrored cabinet. The same applies to perfume, room fragrances, and the paints and varnishes used for instance in renovation work. Therefore, when painting, always ventilate well and, ideally, do not put the mirrors back up until the fumes have dissipated.

HERE'S HOW TO BEST CARE FOR YOUR MIRROR

To gently clean your mirror, it is best to use only warm water and a lint-free cloth. Chamois leather or paper towels are ideal for this. Dampen the cloth only slightly and make sure that no drops of water are left on the edge of the mirror. For stubborn stains, a dash of mild washing-up liquid or a splash of methylated spirits or bioethanol may help. If you live in an area with very hard water, you can use distilled water to prevent limescale streaks. The most important thing is to finish by wiping the mirror and mirror edges dry immediately after cleaning.