

Garbage Disposal Do's and Don'ts



Proper maintenance and operation will extend the life of your garbage disposal and prevent plumbing and drain mishaps.

Good Practices Today Can Prevent Major Plumbing and Drain Problems Tomorrow!

If you have a garbage disposal in your kitchen, you know that it's a great appliance that makes household duties less demanding. But if not operated or maintained properly, a garbage disposal can easily break down, block and clog the drains and cause a long list of expensive plumbing and drain nightmares.

Clogged drains are a major inconvenience and garbage disposal repair can be a costly proposition. Fortunately, most garbage disposal troubles are completely unnecessary, and garbage disposal care and maintenance is extremely easy. Treat your garbage disposal well, and it will treat you well, in return. Below, we describe the mistakes you should avoid and the actions you should take in order to keep your garbage disposal working smoothly for many years and minimize the likelihood that you'll need to call for plumbing or drain cleaning services.

Garbage Disposal Do's:

- Do keep your garbage disposal clean. Pour a little dish soap inside and let the garbage disposal run for a minute or so with some cold water after washing dishes.
- Do run your garbage disposal regularly. Frequent use prevents rust and corrosion, assures that all parts stay moving and prevents obstructions from accumulating.

- Do grind food waste w/ a strong flow of cold water. Why cold water? It will cause any grease or oils that may get into the unit to solidify, so that they can be chopped up before reaching the trap.
- Do grind certain hard materials such as small chicken and fish bones, egg shells, small fruit pits, etc. A scouring action is created by these particles inside the grind chamber that cleans the garbage disposals walls.
- Do grind peelings from citrus fruits such as lemons or oranges to freshen up drain smells.
- Do cut large items into smaller pieces. Put them into the garbage disposal one at a time instead of trying to shove a large amount in at once.

Garbage Disposal Don'ts:

The most important rule of thumb: ***Don't Put Anything In The Garbage Disposal That Is Not Biodegradable Food.*** A garbage disposal is not a trash can; it's for food scraps only. Non food items can damage both blades and the motor. When in doubt, throw it out!

- Don't grind glass, plastic, metal or even paper.
- Don't grind anything combustible.
- Don't grind cigarette butts
- Don't pour grease, oil or fat into your garbage disposal or drain. Grease will slowly accumulate and impede your garbage disposals grinding ability as well as clog drains.
- Don't use hot water when grinding food waste. Hot water will cause grease to liquefy and accumulate, causing drains to clog.
- Don't grind extremely fibrous material like corn husks, celery stalks, onion skins, and artichokes. Fibers from these can tangle and jam the garbage disposal motor and block drains .
- Don't turn off the motor or water until grinding is completed. When grinding is complete, turn off the the garbage disposal first. Let water continue to run for at least 15 seconds, flushing out any remaining particles. Then turn off water.
- Don't put too many potato peels down the garbage disposal. The starches in the potatoes will turn into a thick paste and may cause blades to stick.
- Don't put large amounts of food down the garbage disposal. Feed food into the garbage disposal a little at a time with the cold water running; this will help the food scraps flow down freely through the drain pipes and plumbing.
- Don't put expandable foods into your garbage disposal. Foods like pasta and rice expand when you add water in a pot; they do the same thing once inside your pipes or garbage disposal and are the cause of many jams and clogs.
- Don't grind large animal bones (beef, pork etc.).
- Avoid putting coffee grounds down the garbage disposal. They won't harm the garbage disposal and they'll actually help eliminate odors. However, they can accumulate in drains and pipes, causing clogs. Best to avoid.
- Don't use harsh chemicals like bleach or drain cleaners. They can damage blades and pipes. Borax is a natural sink cleaner and sanitizer that effectively works on odor-causing mold and mildew that accumulates in garbage disposals. (See more below).

Keeping Your Garbage Disposal Running Problem-Free

Ice is an extremely effective and inexpensive method for cleaning your garbage disposal, sharpening the blades and breaking up any grease build-up which has accumulated. Just toss a few ice cubes into the garbage disposal and run it. As the garbage disposal chops into the ice cubes, the ice chips will effectively scour all the hard to reach areas of the unit, and melt down the drain. Try this once or twice a month to keep your garbage disposal in fine working order.

To Remove or Prevent Nasty Garbage Disposal Smells

Here are some natural methods to clean your garbage disposal that are good for the environment and very inexpensive.

- Periodically, take a lemon or orange and toss it into the disposal. The oils and juice from the fruits and peels naturally clean the walls inside the garbage disposal and create a fresh, long-lasting scent.
- Freeze vinegar in ice cube trays and run those down the disposal. This will keep your blades sharp while safely killing odor-causing bacteria.
- For stubborn odors pour baking soda into the drain and let it set for several hours before running the water and garbage disposal.
- For really stubborn odors, use a safe cleaning product like Borax. Just pour 3-4 tablespoons of Borax down the drain and let it sit for an hour. Then turn on the hot water and flush the borax away.

Tips for Removing Fallen Objects

NEVER, EVER insert your unprotected hand into the garbage disposal...unless, of course, you want to lose it! If you must use your hand to remove objects and debris from the garbage disposal, unplug the unit or turn off the appropriate circuit breaker. Always wear safety gloves to protect your hand from the garbage disposals sharp blades.

There are safer steps in retrieving the fallen objects. First, grab a flashlight and try to find the exact location of the object. Use a pair of extra-long needle nose pliers or an automotive finger gripper (available at most hardware stores) to extract the object from the garbage disposal. In some case, you may be able to use a bent coat-hanger to reach down into the garbage disposal and dislodge and hook the object. Even a pair of chopsticks or crochet needles can work to grab the object.

What To Do if Your Garbage Disposal is Not Grinding:

- 90% of garbage disposals that appear not to be working just need to be reset. There is usually a red or black reset button on the garbage disposal motor underneath your sink. Just push to reset.
If the garbage disposal is plugged into a wall outlet, ensure the outlet has power.
- Check for a blown fuse or tripped circuit breaker.
- Give it a push-start. Most garbage disposals have a hole underneath that allows you to hand-crank it free once it's been jammed. To crank it, use either an Alan wrench or a garbage disposal tool that you can pick up at most hardware stores. This should free up most non-serious jams.

