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CLEANING AND PROTECTING OUTDOOR FABRICS

by Marianne Iosso

RV awnings, boat covers and cushions, pop-up camper tops and patio umbrellas are all outdoor fabrics that require a modest amount of care to maintain their appearance and keep them functioning properly. By following a few simple routines, these fabrics can provide years of service.

The best way to protect outdoor fabrics is to prevent certain conditions from occurring in the first place. Moisture, darkness, dirt, insects, bird droppings, leaves and tree sap, and environmental pollutants are all enemies. Any combination of these can cause mildew and/or stains that will quickly deteriorate the material.

Mildew is a live fungus that grows on warm, damp surfaces. Even if the fabric is mildew-resistant, it can quickly gain a foothold if the material is dirty with organic contaminants such as from birds, insects and trees.

Always check the underside of fabric for signs of mildew, where it tends to be dark and damp. Also, look for pooling water. If this occurs, make the necessary adjustments so that water runs off properly.

One of the best ways to avoid mildew and stains is to prevent dirt from remaining on the fabric too long or becoming embedded in the fibers. To clean, use a soft bristled brush and lightly brush off loose dirt. Hose down fabrics after use or at least every few weeks. Pick a hot, sunny day so they'll dry quickly and completely before putting them away.

Once you have mildew or stains, you'll need a more vigorous cleaning program. Soap and water simply won't do it.

Iosso Mold & Mildew Stain Remover tackles all types of tough stains without bleach. It won't damage the fabric, weaken the threads or alter the color. It's biodegradable, so it's safe for grass, trees, bushes and wildlife. A powdered concentrate, it's very economical to use. One \$15 jar mixes up to three gallons of solution.

It's also easy to use Mold & Mildew Stain Remover. Mix it up, brush or spray it on gently and let it sit several minutes or until the stains are lightened. If you're cleaning a large area, apply it with a garden pump sprayer. This allows you to access the hard to reach places. You can also use a pressure washer, but keep the pressure on low to not damage the fabric. Once the solution soaks in and is lightly brushed if needed, it's rinsed completely and air dried.

It's important to protect fabrics from the elements to keep them looking good and weathering well. There are many different types of protectant products on the market. Some are silicone- or solvent- based which leave an oily residue and only offer water repellency. Iosso Water Repellent is water-based and leaves no residue. It protects without changing the look or feel of the fabric. It offers triple protection against water, soil and oil.

Always be sure the fabric is clean and dry before application. If you don't, you'll just seal in the dirt, making matters worse. Apply Iosso Water Repellent by spraying the solution onto the fabric. Let it dry at least 24 hours before exposing to rain or water.

Iosso Water Repellent is available in various sizes, but concentrated offers hidden savings. One gallon of concentrate mixes to five gallons, saving

four gallons or 38 lbs. in shipping charges. Many competing products can't offer a concentrate due to the chemistry and end up costing more. A one-gallon jug of concentrate costs \$160, but larger and smaller amounts are available.

Another great option is the Iosso Fabric Cleaner & Protectant Kit. It contains one jar of the Mold & Mildew Stain Remover which will mix up to three gallons of product, and a quart concentrate of the Water Repellent which mixes up to two gallons. It's enough to clean and protect up to 450 square feet of fabric for a cost of only \$74.

Iosso cleaning and protection products make taking care of outdoor fabrics safe and easy. Doing so regularly will add life and weatherability to them, and maintain their good looks for years to come.

Contact Iosso Products, 1485 Lively Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007. Toll-free 888-747-4332. iossoproducts@iosso.com; www.iosso.com.

About the author

Marianne Iosso is vice-president of Iosso Products. The company formulates and manufactures high-performance, environmentally responsible cleaning products servicing the marine, RV, automotive, aircraft, shooting and hunting, and military and police markets.