

To disinfect a vase after flowers die, empty it, wash it thoroughly with dish soap and water, then use a disinfectant suitable for the vase material. Follow the product label for dilution, contact time, and any rinsing instructions before letting the vase dry.

Start by removing the old flowers

Take the flowers and any foliage out of the vase, then pour the water down the drain. Put the plant material in your compost or rubbish, depending on what your local collection accepts. Check the bottom of the vase for fallen leaves and bits of stem, which can hide under cloudy water.

Rinse the vase with warm water to loosen any debris. If the water smells unpleasant or the inside feels slippery, take care not to splash it onto nearby dishes or food. Clear the sink first, and wash your hands after handling the old stems.

A quick rinse is useful, but it is not enough on its own. Disinfectant needs to reach the surface of the vase, so wash away visible dirt and residue first.

Wash and disinfect the vase

For a glass or glazed ceramic vase, use the following steps. If your vase has a delicate finish or decoration, check the maker's care instructions before choosing a cleaning product.

1. Fill the vase partway with warm water and a little dish soap. Scrub the inside and rim with a bottle brush or a soft sponge. Pay attention to the waterline and the bottom, where residue often collects.

2. Wash the outside and the base too. Rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove the soap and loosened material.
3. Apply a disinfectant that is suitable for the vase surface. An unscented household bleach product may be an option if its label gives directions for disinfecting that material. Dilute it as directed on the label, using water at the temperature specified.
4. Keep the surfaces wet for the full contact time stated on the label. This may take several minutes, so check the instructions rather than guessing.
5. Rinse if the label directs you to, then leave the vase to air dry. Wash your brush or sponge and clean the sink afterward.

Wear gloves if the product label recommends them, and keep the room ventilated. Never mix bleach with vinegar, ammonia, or other cleaning products. Store disinfectants out of reach of children and pets.

Deal with stubborn residue and delicate vases

If a narrow neck makes scrubbing difficult, choose a bottle brush that reaches the bottom without forcing it. For dried residue, let warm, soapy water sit in the vase before scrubbing again. Rinse away the soap before applying disinfectant.

Porous or unglazed containers can be harder to clean thoroughly because moisture and residue may collect in the surface. Follow the maker's instructions, and avoid soaking a vase if you are unsure how its finish will respond. Do not assume a disinfectant is safe for a painted, metallic, or antique surface.

Once the vase is clean and dry, store it somewhere it will stay free of dust. It will be ready for fresh water and your next bunch of flowers.

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