

Guidance for Cleaning Faucet Aerators

Faucet aerators are the small, round screens at the tip of your kitchen and bathroom faucets. They help mix air with water to create a smooth stream, reduce splashing, and lower water use.

Over time, these aerators can get clogged with sediment, minerals, and other buildup. This can allow the growth of bacteria, including bacteria that can cause illnesses like Legionnaires' disease. To keep your faucets working properly and free of debris, clean your aerators routinely. You should also clean them after any water service disruption (for example, a water main break), and more often if the manufacturer recommends it.

Cleaning involves removing the aerator and soaking it in white vinegar or another cleaning solution to dissolve buildup. If the aerator is damaged or very dirty, it's best to replace it with a new one. Removing old aerators, especially if they haven't been cleaned in a long time, can be difficult and may damage your faucet due to rust or corrosion. The New Jersey Department of Health is not responsible for any damage that may occur. If you're unsure or if your faucet is difficult to service, it's safest to hire a qualified plumber.

People who are at higher risk for infections (e.g., individuals who are ≥ 50 years old, smoke, have a weakened immune system, have chronic lung disease, or have underlying health conditions) should avoid exposure to water splashing that may occur when removing and cleaning aerators.

Supplies Needed:



Adjustable wrench



Cup



Towel



Distilled white vinegar



Faucet aerator key



Masking tape



Plastic bag



Toothbrush

1. Cover the Sink Drain

Cover the sink drain with a towel or plug it before unscrewing the aerator. This will prevent any parts or fittings from accidentally falling into the drain.



2. Unscrew the Aerator

Depending on the faucet design, aerators that protrude from the end can be unscrewed by hand or with a traditional wrench or plier. To prevent scratching or damaging the polished finish, wrap masking tape around the aerator before using any tools for removal.

If you do not see an aerator, it might be recessed/hidden inside the faucet. Use a faucet aerator key wrench tool, which may have come with the faucet or can be bought at a hardware store, to unscrew it.

If the aerator is stuck due to mineral deposits, fill a small plastic bag with white vinegar and tie it around the faucet so the aerator is completely submerged for 10 to 20 minutes. This will help loosen the mineral buildup. Afterward, remove the bag and try to unscrew the aerator again. If you're still unable to remove it, consult a licensed or qualified plumber.



3. Take a Picture of the Assembled Aerator

After removing the aerator, but before taking the aerator apart, take pictures to ensure you can put everything back together correctly when you're ready.



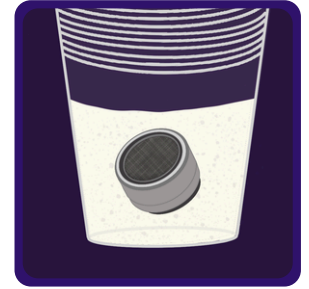
4. Remove Stuck Parts

Carefully check inside the faucet's spout and remove any rubber washers, inserts, or parts that might be stuck.



5. Soak the Aerator in a Cup of White Vinegar

Submerge and soak the aerator in a cup of vinegar to loosen debris and grime buildup. Typically, soaking for 20 to 30 minutes will be enough to clean the aerator. If you encounter extensive and tough residue, consider soaking it for a longer period.



6. Scrub the Aerator with a Toothbrush

Use a toothbrush to manually scrub all parts of the aerator, removing stubborn debris or grime. Be gentle and slow when scrubbing the screen part, as tough bristles can damage it. Hold the screen up to a light source to check for any remaining debris. If needed, repeat the scrubbing process to eliminate any leftover fragments.



7. Rinse the Aerator

Thoroughly rinse each part of the aerator under fresh running water. Hold the aerator screen upside down to ensure any remaining debris is washed out.



8. Assemble the Aerator

Use the picture you took before taking things apart to ensure all parts of the aerator are placed back in the correct order.



9. Screw Back the Aerator

After assembling all parts of the aerator, screw it back onto the faucet by hand. Use a wrench or key tool to gently tighten it. Again, you can use masking tape to protect the polished finish. Turn on the faucet to check for proper water flow. If any water sprays or leaks from around the aerator, gently and carefully tighten it a little more but avoid over-tightening.

