

[Clotheslines: Beginner's Guide to Line Drying Laundry](#)

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If the clothesline were invented today, it would be touted as the solar powered, eco-friendly renewable laundry solution. With the invention of automatic tumble dryers, harnessing the power of the sun to dry clothes has fallen out of favor, to the point that some communities even ban clotheslines on the grounds that they cheapen the neighborhood.

A clothesline need not be an eyesore. A neatly hung clothesline, with the clothes spaced evenly and grouped together, instead of randomly arrayed on the line, can be a banner of commitment to the environment. Not to mention the benefits to the wallet. An electric tumble dryer is the third biggest energy hog in the average house, behind lights and the refrigerator, both of which are on a lot longer each week than the dryer.

To get started line drying, you will need:

- Clothesline or drying rack
- Clothespins - the spring-loaded pins are easier for novice line dryers. You'll need about 100 to start
- Clothespin bag - anything that holds the pins so they're handy
- Sturdy laundry basket - heavy-duty enough to take a wet load outside

There are two basic types of permanent clotheslines: T-poles and umbrellas. T-poles have two metal T-shaped supports permanently set in the yard, usually about 20 feet apart, connected by 4 lines. The umbrellas have a single pole with arms that extend out and line strung between the arms in a square. Umbrella lines have the advantage of being collapsible and can be mounted so the entire unit can be removed and stowed when not in use.

Many older houses have clotheslines installed already, though you may need to string new line if you've never used the T-poles before. From personal experience, I recommend the green vinyl-coated wire clothesline. It is harder to tie on initially—you may need a friend and a pair of needlenose pliers to get the line taut and tied—but the green wire lasts longer and blends into the landscape. Durability and weight bearing are two vital characteristics of good clothesline. You don't want your clean clothes taking a dive into the grass when the string breaks.

Portable drying racks and retractable lines are solutions for limited space or if you're drying under the radar of a homeowners' association. Portable racks can be used indoors or out for year-round line drying.

The Basic Line Drying Technique

There is a knack to hanging clothes neatly, so don't worry if it takes a while at first. My own first load on the line took me nearly an hour to hang. By the time I was done hanging, the clothes were dry. With practice, it now takes me less than 10 minutes to hang a load out.

The spring-loaded pins have two grooves, a larger one toward the end and a smaller one closer to the spring. With rare exceptions, the smaller groove fits over the line and the larger groove holds the garment. You'll need 50-100 clothespins to hang out the contents of a large washing machine.

The traditional technique for line drying involves giving each garment a quick shake to snap out the wrinkles before hanging. Some clothesline users maintain that snapping clothes makes them softer when they dry. At the very least, it smoothes out some of the wrinkles, though the sun and wind take care of most wrinkles with or without shaking. If your washer has an adjustable spin cycle, setting the final spin to medium also reduces wrinkling.

To hang clothes, hold the garment in your non-dominant hand and grab two pins from your bag with your dominant hand. Clip one of the pins over the line and grab a small bit of the garment with the pin. Spread the garment across the line, holding it slightly below the clothesline. Once you get to the opposite side of the garment, clip the second pin over the line and grab the other side of the garment in the larger groove.

Shirts

You can hang shirts from the shoulders or the tails. To hang from the shoulders, pin along the shoulder seam, as close to the sleeve as you can. To hang from the tail, fold a couple of inches of the bottom of the shirt over the line and secure the line and shirt with the large hole in the clothespin. Hanging by the tail produces some small wrinkles where the pins were, but those are usually tucked in.

Dresses

Hang dresses from the shoulders. Try to hang from a seam if you can, to minimize wrinkles.

Pants

To get a good crease in pants, hang from the cuffs with the inseams together. For faster drying time, hang the pant legs from parallel lines, so air can circulate between the legs. The crease isn't as apparent using this method, but jeans dry faster and more evenly.

Shorts and Skirts

Hang shorts and skirts from the waistbands. For longer or heavier shorts and skirts, you may need an extra pin or two between the ends.

Socks

Clothes hanging advice from the 1930s recommended hanging socks and stockings by the heels. I find the toes to be easier and neater looking on the line. To make folding easier, hang socks in pairs, with two socks per pin.

Bedding

Sheets can hang lengthwise, with 1/2 to 1/3 folded over the line. Hang fitted sheets with the pockets tucked toward the inside, since the gathered corners can accumulate airborne debris. Hang pillowcases from the short seam, not the opening hem, to keep debris out. Either hang sheets last or hang them on the downwind line. Breezes tend to catch bedding, and the flapping sheets get in the way of hanging the rest of the laundry.

Towels

Hang towels with 1/2 to 1/3 folded over the line, and secure with the large groove in the clothespin. Line dried towels aren't as fluffy soft as their tumble-dried counterparts. Some people enjoy the post-shower exfoliation, while others don't. You can get the fluffy softness by taking the towels down from the line slightly damp and running them through the tumble dryer for a few minutes to finish drying.

An Unmentionable Problem

Line drying efforts eventually run up against the issue of delicates, and whether or how to hang your panties to the wind. There is nothing wrong with hanging out your delicates, if done properly. After all, you're not the only house on the block with underwear!

Clotheslines, except for the single retractable lines, have multiple lines running parallel. Simply hang underwear on the inner lines, and block the view by hanging towels, sheets, t-shirts or other large items on the outer lines.

Drying Time

Drying time on a clothesline depends on the weather conditions. On a hot day with a breeze, clothes may be dry in as little as a half hour. On cooler days, clothes may take most of a morning or afternoon. As you gain experience, you will get a sense of how long to leave clothes out.

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