

Care of Footwear

Give Winter Grime the Boot



Biggest Challenges

- Telltale road-salt stains on leather
- Black scuff marks on leather or rubber
- Dirty, flattened suede

Fastest Fixes

1 Banish salt lines If your town fights icy streets with road salt, you've surely had "ring around the shoe," a white salt line that appears when leather dries. Desalting products, available at shoe-repair shops, are one option, but it's just as easy to mix an at-home cleaner of equal parts white vinegar and water. Soak a rag in the solution and dab the shoes. Rinse with a water-dampened cloth, and wipe with a dry towel. Let the shoes dry, *away* from radiators or other heat sources, which can make leather brittle. Finally, buff with a soft cloth.

2 Erase scuffs You might be tempted to scrub at ugly black marks on leather, but they need a lighter touch: Dip a soft cloth in water, then baking soda, and rub the spots gently. For rubber boots, follow the same process, but substitute your kitchen scouring powder for the baking soda. (This stronger treatment will also work on wooden or composite heels that aren't covered in leather.) Once spots are gone, wipe the footwear with a clean, damp cloth and buff dry.

3 Be suede smart The wet cleaning remedies that work for smooth leather aren't good for suede, which needs to stay dry so it doesn't lose its texture. Instead, quickly rub off overall dirt with a kneadable eraser (grab one from your kid's art box), or just lightly sand away obvious stains with an emery board. To raise the nap of suede that's flattened, scrub briskly with a clean toothbrush or terry cloth towel. If it's *really* matted, hold the shoe a few inches above the spout of a steaming teakettle for a few seconds, then brush up the nap.

Make It Easier Next Time

- To keep pesky salt lines from forming, take action as soon as possible once indoors: Before your shoes dry off, dampen the entire leather upper with a wet sponge, then stuff the shoe with newspaper to help hold the shape.
- Before you wear shoes and boots in messy weather for the first time, spray them with a water-repellent coating, like GHRI-tested Protect-all from Kiwi (\$5.50), which works on both suede and leather. Spray again during the season, after cleaning. —Carolyn Forté

