

HOW TO SAFELY CLEAN HEADSTONES

The #1 MOST IMPORTANT RULE: Always to be as gentle as possible.

Wire brushes, metal instruments and abrasive pads may give you instant satisfaction but, if you clean with anything that is harder than the stone, you risk scratching the face of the stone and causing more damage in the long run. The same goes for acidic cleaners, which include most household cleaners. Using bleach may give you instant brightness but it will cause the stone to change in pallor and most often become rough to the touch. This rough texture gives lichen even MORE surface to grow on and attach to, making it even harder to clean the next time. **And there WILL be a next time.**

How to begin:

- A. Always begin with clean water, a **soft** bristle, natural or nylon, scrub brush, and **wood** scrapers. Tongue blades or craft sticks work well. Remember, NO metal. Begin the cleaning process with the softest brush to see if it will get the job done. A toilet bowl brush has been found to be effective in many cases. Move on to a stiffer tool ONLY if absolutely necessary, not just because you want quick results. **BE SAFE, BE PATIENT!**
- B. Completely saturate the stone to be cleaned with CLEAN water and a NEW brush. Do not use old contaminated brushes used with previous non gravestone cleaning projects, especially NOT an old brush used in a toilet.
- C. Keep the stone really wet at all times. A dry surface will scratch and pit more readily.
 - 1) Powerwashers, which might be okay on the new headstone materials such as granite, are NOT recommended for use on older fragile stones. Anything that puts out greater than 60 psi is too much force on marble, limestone and sandstone.
 - 2) Garden type sprayers work well. Home centers sell various types with prices starting as low as \$10. A sprayer will use much less water than the old bucket and brush method. Additionally, the bucket method returns polluted water, still on the brush, back into the clean water, thus contaminating it.
 - 3) Clean the **back** of a gravestone first. If you don't clean it first, you may not clean it at all, once you can read the inscription on the front, many people don't want to spend the time required to finish the job.
 - 4) Clean the stone from the bottom up to avoid streaking and further staining. Rinse often as you go and do NOT allow dirty water to dry on the stone as it will stain the porous material.
- D. Household ammonia may be used; if you can stand the fumes. Mix as you would for household cleaning, about 1 cup of ammonia to a gallon of water. Don't use ammonia with anything extra in it, such as scents and suds. Wear proper eye protection!
- E. If lichen is a problem, soak it down several times with water and scrape with a wooden scraper as mentioned above. Unfortunately, many lichens will, once removed, leave a scarring affect on the stone because the waste product they give off is an acid that works with the stone's own salts and chemistry to erode it.

Over the past decade or so there have been a number of newer products developed that will effectively remove all biological activity from stone and masonry without any risk of harming the stone itself. These types of cleaning products are known as biological cleaners. The first material created in this capacity is called **D/2 Biological Cleaning Solution**. Although the cemetery staff has not found it locally, it is available on-line at <http://d2bio.com/>

Reports indicate that it is the least invasive of the biological cleaners and although D/2 sometimes leaves a pinkish / purplish hue to the stone, that usually disappears in 3 – 7 days and even quicker when the product is liberally washed off the stone 12 hours after application.

The #2 MOST IMPORTANT RULE: Always flush the stone well when done; and then flush once MORE!