

Tools for Cleaning a Headstone

Before you head out to the cemetery, be sure to have some basic supplies with you. These supplies include:

- Jugs of *distilled* water (or garden hose if water access is available)
- Spray bottle / garden sprayer (new, ***never used*** for any type of chemical)
- Natural bristle brush or nylon brush, varying sizes and stiffness
- Firm toothbrush
- Sponges
- Craft Sticks (to gently remove lichens)

Take Precautions Before Cleaning a Headstone

Before you attempt to clean a headstone, you must first check its condition. If there is evidence of any of the following, do not proceed with cleaning.

- Any stability issues whatsoever
- The stone or lettering has any evidence of flaking or parts of the stone falling away
- Fractures anywhere on the stone
- If anything even slightly suggests that the headstone is fragile or even slightly vulnerable
- If gently tapping the stone or the base results in any hollow sound
- A wooden headstone

If the condition of the stone appears to be okay, keep in mind the following basic suggestions when beginning to clean a headstone. It is important to note, that if the only reason to clean a stone is to remove lichens, algae, etc., it is not necessary as it may do more harm to the stone than good.

- Equipment:**
1. Spray water bottle
 2. Nylon scrub brush with a handle, **no metal**
 3. Toothbrush
 4. White construction chalk (found at Menards)
 5. Grass clippers
 6. Bottle of drinking water to stay hydrated
 7. Something to hold back the plantings that block the view of the tombstone
 8. Optional:
 - Hat
 - Sunblock
 - Bug spray
 - Cell phone
 - Small chair, if needed

So, How Do You Clean a Headstone?

1. Using water with different kinds and sizes of natural bristle brushes will require some patience, but it is the most natural and safest way to clean stones.
2. To begin, thoroughly saturate the headstone with water. By using a spray bottle or even a pump sprayer, you can use less water and ensure a clean rinse each time.
3. Begin cleaning the stone starting at the bottom and work upward. This will help to prevent any streaking and/or any additional staining from occurring than if you worked from the top down. Be sure to rinse the area cleaned often with the water.
4. It is best to begin cleaning with the softest brushes possible and only gradually move to stiffer natural bristle brushes if needed. Remember, **never** use a wire or metal brush.
5. If there are lichens or moss growing on the stone, gently scrape it with your wooden or plastic scrapers. Often, it will come off fairly easily, other times, it may need to be repeated.
6. When using a brush on the stone, use random circular motions which also helps with keeping streaking at a minimum.
7. Rinse the cleaned area often and thoroughly rinse it when you've completed the cleaning of the headstone.
8. Repeat for all sides of the marker.

What Not to Do When Cleaning a Headstone

When you follow the steps above, you'll be well on your way to preserving someone's marker longer. What we do not want to do is anything that will accelerate the wearing of the stone, discoloring of the stone, etc.

What You Should **Not** Use to Clean a Headstone

- Wire bristled brushes
- Metal anything
- Abrasive pads
- Pressure washers
- Sand blasters
- Power tools
- Bleach
- Acid or acidic cleaning agents (especially on marble or limestone) - should only be used by those properly trained working on non-calcareous stone ^[1]
- Household cleaners including soap, detergents, Borax, TSP, anything you'd use to clean your home ^[1]
- Any type of sealant

Remember—using improper cleaning materials can cause permanent and non-repairable damage to the headstones! Our goal is to preserve the headstone, not give it an accelerator to make things worse sooner than later.