

Headstone Cleaning Checklist

1. Get permission from the cemetery for cleaning gravestones **before** you clean. Some cemeteries only allow family members to clean stones of their family. Some cemeteries do not allow non-staff to clean stones.
2. Once you have permission, assess the area around the gravestone that you want to clean. Are there trip hazards? Are there dangerous grave markers around the stone you want to clean? Are there “widow makers” on trees overhanging your stone? Inform the cemetery if you find hazards.
3. Now move closer to your stone and take a picture. This step is often neglected. You want a “before” photo for the record. Fill the frame with the whole grave marker.
4. Now move in closer to the stone you want to clean. Is it leaning precariously? Has it shifted on its base? Does it look “fragile”? If yes to any of these, do **not** clean it! Stone is very heavy and you do not want to hurt yourself or cause the stone any damage. Consider spritzing it with D/2 and walking away (see Step 14).
5. Move in closer yet and touch your stone. Does it move? If it is a tablet stone, try wiggling it with two fingers. If it moves, do **not** clean it! Consider spritzing it with D/2 and walking away (see Step 14).
6. Are there any significant plants next to the stone that are important to the cemetery? Make sure the cemetery is aware that you may be doing harm to plants around the stone.
7. Now you are ready to clean your gravestone. You really only need four tools: a wooden stick, a soft bristle brush, a bucket, and water.
8. On stable stone surfaces, wet the stone thoroughly with clean running water or a garden sprayer. The water will wash away some of the dirt and biological material. Pull plants gently from cracks or clip them, and then brush away soil and debris from the stone. If there is a mass of plant life, do not yank the plant out, you will almost certainly damage the stone. Carefully clip and pluck each section to prevent pulling away any loose or weakened stone fragments.
9. Once the worst of the biologics are removed, using scrapers that are softer than the stone, such as a wooden popsicle stick or caramel apple skewer, gently brush or scrape off algae, lichen, and fungus.
10. Gently scrub the stone with very light pressure in a circular motion using a natural soft-bristle brush (e.g., Tampico) on marble or nylon bristle brush on harder marble to further remove soil and biological growth from the stone. Work from the bottom of the stone up toward the top on larger markers – this prevents staining and streaking as clean water flows downward. Do not use a dry brush as the abrasion from a dry brush can cause damage by removing the upper layers of the stone. Constantly dunk your brush in a bucket of water, or better, allow a water hose to run on the stone as you brush.
11. Rinse your brush frequently. Do not abrade the stone by dragging dirt, sand, stone particles across the surface you are cleaning. If a gravestone is particularly dirty, change the water in your bucket frequently, so that you are not dipping your brush into a suspended solution of grit and biological matter.
12. When done, rinse the stone thoroughly with water.
13. Step back and admire your work. Be sure to take an “after” photo for the record.
14. If you would like to use D/2 to further lighten any biological staining on the stone, such as black tar mold, now is the time to do it.
15. Spray D/2 on the damp stone, covering completely, and allow 5-10 minutes to work.
16. Lightly scrub the D/2 into the entire stone keeping the stone damp with the D/2.
17. Rinse the entire stone thoroughly with clean water.
18. Step back, admire your work once again, and come back in a month and see if the stone looks even cleaner. D/2 often needs to be reapplied as just a spritz to further eliminate staining.