

# Basic Sword Care and Maintenance 101



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# BASIC SWORD CARE AND MAINTENANCE 101

Probably the only thing that I like about those cheap wallhanger swords is that they are easy to maintain and keep clean. If someone handles them with mucky fingers, a quick spray of Windex and a wipe with a rag is enough to clean them up (ahhh, the wonders of stainless steel).

On the other hand, you can't have much fun with them (unless taking them out and having a look qualifies as fun!) so I guess that it kind of balances out a bit more in favor of the functional replicas now doesn't it. ☺

The only problem is, if you've never owned a REAL sword before - basic sword care and maintenance can seem like a pretty daunting subject. And if someone handles your sword with their naked fingers, you'll want to clean it up pretty quick as human skin is quite acidic and can cause a high carbon steel blade to rust in record time (which is why, in all the museums, the curators handle a sword's blade wearing those white gloves!).

The reality is though - looking after your swords isn't that hard - all you need to know is a few basic principles applied with a little common sense.

In this little e-book, I'll be guiding you through the basics - from how to store your swords when not in use, how to keep them in tip top condition, some things to avoid at all costs, and some basic "first aid" to restore them to near perfect condition if you scuff them up a little (after all, if you don't get a few little scratches on your sword every now and again, I seriously doubt you are having much fun with them at all).

So let's get started!

**PLEASE NOTE:** The techniques in this e-book are primarily geared towards medieval sword replicas. Japanese Katana are a different kettle of fish entirely and are the subject of a different (upcoming) e-book, though some principles (such as oiling) are basically universal.

# OILING YOUR SWORD

Ok - now as you'll probably know by now, a fully functional sword is made from high carbon steel. And the problem now, just as it was in medieval times, is that high carbon steel swords are prone to *rust* if exposed to moisture for a prolonged period of time.

In a dry climate, you don't need to worry about this anywhere near as much as in a humid one (unless you get your sword wet that is). And as a general rule of thumb, to keep your swords totally spotless and blemish free you only need to oil your sword once every month or so in a typical temperate climate, up to once a week if it's very humid.

Naturally enough, if you use your sword for test cutting or training, it's a very good idea to include oiling it afterwards as part of your training rituals.

## **W**HAT OILS TO USE

Ask 10 different sword collectors and they'll probably give you 10 different answers on which oil you should use. Personally, I like to use Hanwei Sword oil - but that's just me. And the end of the day though, pretty much *any* light to medium oil works fine, in fact – in a pinch, you can even use vegetable oil!

But here's a few basic groups that most collectors swear by, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Pure Mineral Oil (from your local pharmacy "light mineral oil")
- ✓ Rem Oil (Sewing machine oil)
- ✓ Gun Oil

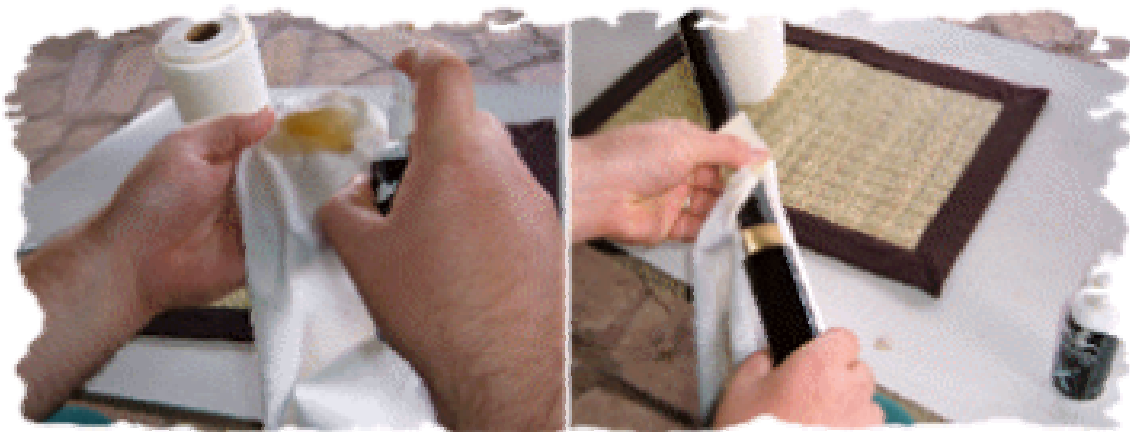
I DO use WD-40 for short term oiling, as a cleaning agent and to drive away moisture after test cutting with plastic bottles. BUT don't use it to protect against rust for long periods of time - the stuff tends to evaporate much quicker than the oils listed above, leaving your sword unprotected.

The actual process of oiling a sword isn't rocket science.

First off, just give your sword a quick wipe with a paper towel to remove any remnants of previous oilings, dust, etc until it is clean and dry.

Then simply put or spray a little oil onto a lint free rag and give it a wipe along the entire length of the blade. You only need the smallest amount to protect your blade and it certainly shouldn't be dripping with oil.

Essentially what you are aiming for is a light protective coating that gives the blade a slight sheen – nothing more.



#### CLEANING UP RUST SPOTS

Of course, if you make a mistake and your sword gets a few rust spots, you'll want to clean it up before it gets out of hand. The good news is, getting rid of rust spots really is a no brainer.

If a few rust spots do appear - a thorough scrub down with a *metal polish* (see page 7 for more details) and a 3M Scotch Brite Pads will usually do the job. It pretty much goes without saying though that you should only use these techniques on replica swords – doing this to an antique would be an insult and removing rust from an antique is well beyond the scope of this e-book. If in doubt – always consult a professional.

# CLEANING 'GUNK' OFF A SWORD

Chances are at some point, especially if you are like me and enjoy a bit of good natured test cutting now and again, you'll end up with some gunk on your sword that just doesn't seem to want to come off..

If holding the sword under running water while wiping it doesn't work (and make sure you hold it with the blade pointing down so it doesn't flood into the tang) you can try cleaning it off with some WD-40 and a lint free cloth. Another good alternative is Windex, which actually works surprisingly well.

If the gunk *still* doesn't come off and is REALLY stubborn, you might want to try running a 000 grade scotch brite pad lengthwise.

Don't scrub, just keep making passes until the gunky stuff starts coming off.

After you've finished, dry your sword thoroughly (I like to spray it again with WD-40 to drive off moisture), wipe it and give it a good oiling.

This method combined with a little elbow grease works for 90% of any sticky gunk that gets stuck to the blade, but if it doesn't – you might want to consider giving your sword a good polish (*see page 7 for details*).

# STORING FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME

If you are planning on storing your sword for several months or longer, and don't plan on oiling it regularly, there's a couple of options open to you. But first off, whenever possible, it makes sense to store your sword in a cool, dry place. You don't need to go overboard, but you do need to take this into consideration.

Anyway, the first cardinal rule of storing a sword is - DO NOT STORE IT IN A LEATHER SCABBARD!

You can get away with storing it in a wooden scabbard for a while (though some woods, like pine, are unsuitable) but if you are planning on long term storage, the best way to go is to coat your sword liberally with Vaseline, wrap it in rags, tie it up securely and store it in that aforementioned cool, dry place.

And as you'll know if you've ever ordered a Generation 2 sword, they come with a liberal coating of a kind of Vaseline wax tightly wrapped in plastic for such storage before being shipped.

Some people (and the British Museum!) swear by a product called "Renaissance Wax" which has been specifically designed for long term storage and/or display. It works by coating the blade with a microcrystalline layer of wax which prevents rusting almost indefinitely.

The only downside to Renaissance Wax is the price, which typically sells for US\$30+ for a 200ml canister. However, a little goes a long way with this stuff and it is a good choice for more valuable swords that will be displayed unsheathed for a long period of time, requiring practically zero maintenance.

# POLISH AND REMOVING SURFACE SCRATCHES

Like it or not, if you use your sword (especially for test cutting) at some point or another it's gonna get scratched. All of the swords I recommend on [www.sword-buyers-guide.com](http://www.sword-buyers-guide.com) are very sturdy and don't scratch easily - but naturally enough, if you start putting your swords through blocks of wood or cut cardboard boxes, the blade is gonna start showing a few marks here and there.



In this example, I am going to be polishing out some surface scratches from my Generation 2 Maximilian sword.

After numerous full on cuts deep into a wooden block, splitting more than just a few blocks of wood, and a whole heap of other 'abusive' practices - there are a few small blemishes on the blade that I want to polish out.

While this example uses a Generation 2 sword - the techniques apply equally to ANY medieval style replica. In fact, even some high level production swords come with a few blemishes that a good polish can fix!

Anyway, the first cardinal rule of removing surface scratches is - no matter how much you might be tempted to use a shortcut - **DO NOT** use power tools!

The friction heats up the blade and can ruin the swords temper, plus it's all too easy to remove too much from one area and end up destroying the blades geometry. If you have to remove some chips here and there, you can **VERY CAREFULLY** use something like a *Makita Wet Grinder* as the grinding wheels move slowly and the water keeps the blade from overheating. Or better yet, take your sword to your local knife shop and they can professionally buff out the scratch for a nominal fee.



Ok, so let's get an idea of what is needed to do a basic scratch removal/polish job.

***You will need:***

- ✓ Some metal polish - anything used for polishing steel that is available from an automotive supply store or hardware store is ok. Some popular choices include - Iosso Metal Polish, Flitz and Metal Glo. In this case I am using a German brand called "Edel-Chromglanz".
- ✓ A range of 3M Emery Cloth Metal Abrasive Papers - Coarse, Medium and Fine.
- ✓ Some 3M Scotch Brite Pads
- ✓ You'll also need some Windex, a plastic rubbish bag to avoid making too much of a mess, some lint free cloth and - umm, well a sword! ;)

Once you've got everything together it should look a bit like this.





First things first, you need to lay your sword on a flat surface and begin with the coarsest abrasive paper. With medium pressure, run the paper the length of the blade and back, keeping long and even strokes over the entire length. DON'T scrub - just run it along the length.

You'll find that after the first few passes you are creating long and fine scratches over the blades that will even out with each stage of the process until you are left with a mirrored finish, so don't worry if at first it starts to look almost like satin (some people actually like this look, though I prefer to get to as close to a mirrored finish as possible).

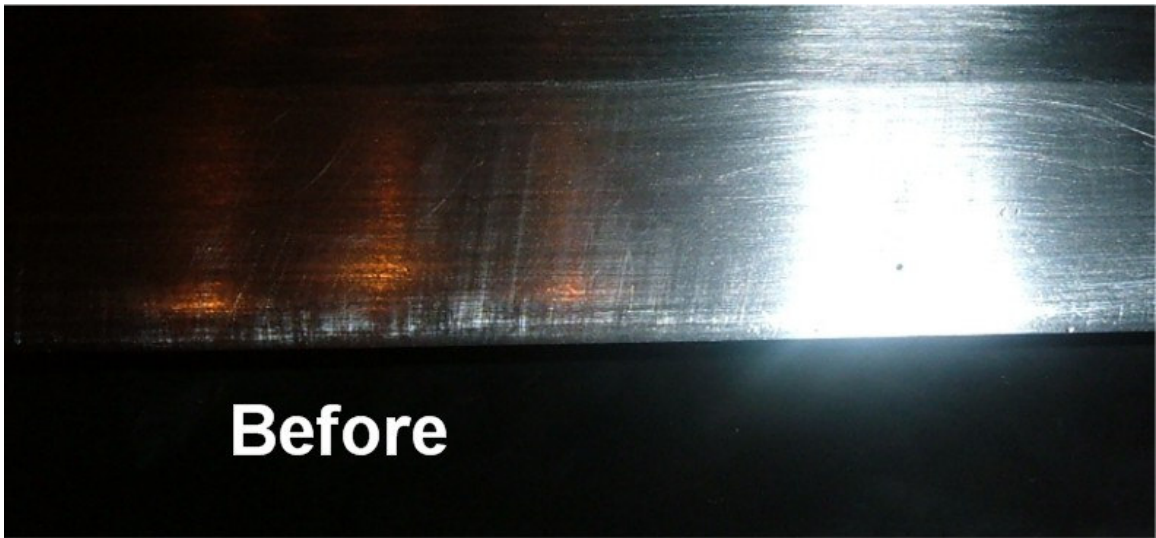
Now repeat the process on the other side of the blade, careful to polish each edge independently and treating the fuller (if it has one) as a third edge to keep the detail crisp and defined.

Next, once you have done both sides, continue the process with the medium and finally the fine grit abrasive papers until you have an even and silky kind of finish. Don't rush, and keep your attention on what you are doing - it's all too easy to slip and cut yourself quite nastily while doing this - in fact, for most sword enthusiasts, most injuries occurred during sword maintenance than at any other time!

Ok, so now you are ready for the final polish. All you need to do is apply some of the metal polish to the Scotch brite pad and scrub like buggery! The more pressure you apply here the better the polish will do its thing - just go to town on it, doing both sides thoroughly with side to side strokes. DON'T circle your strokes.

Once you have give it your all and your hands can't take much more, finish each side with a few long, high pressure strokes.

Finally, give the blade a few squirts of Windex, wipe it down with a cloth until it is dry and viola! You've transformed your sword from scratchy to a near perfect mirror finish in around 1/2 hour!



Of course, the longer you spend doing it - the better the polish will be, and using this technique it is possible to get some pretty remarkable results.

Try it and see, I am sure you will be impressed. 😊

# CLEANING THE PERIPHERALS

Ok, so now you've got a good idea how to maintain the BLADE but what about all the other bits and pieces?

Actually, it's pretty easy really and there's no need to go into any great depth here.

Many affordable beater swords, and Windlass swords in particular, tend to use a lot of synthetic materials on the handle, etc so they don't need any special treatment. But all Gen2 swords use authentic fittings such as real leather and wood, so the following pointers apply.

Wooden handles should be treated with a very light film of lemon or tung oil to avoid cracking. It doesn't need to be done very often though, every 6 to 12 months is enough.

Leather scabbards, sheathes and handle wraps should be treated with a good leather wax paste. Again - less is more applies here equally, you don't need to use too much, just enough to keep the leather revitalized every now and again to prevent cracking if it starts looking a bit shabby - otherwise just leave it alone. It's also important not to get any oil on the leather as the oil will cause it to rot away surprisingly quickly.

Finally, you can treat the scabbard with neatsfoot or mink oil for waterproofing, though don't do this for the handle or you'll make it slippery. And a slippery handle is, for obvious reasons, not a very good idea.