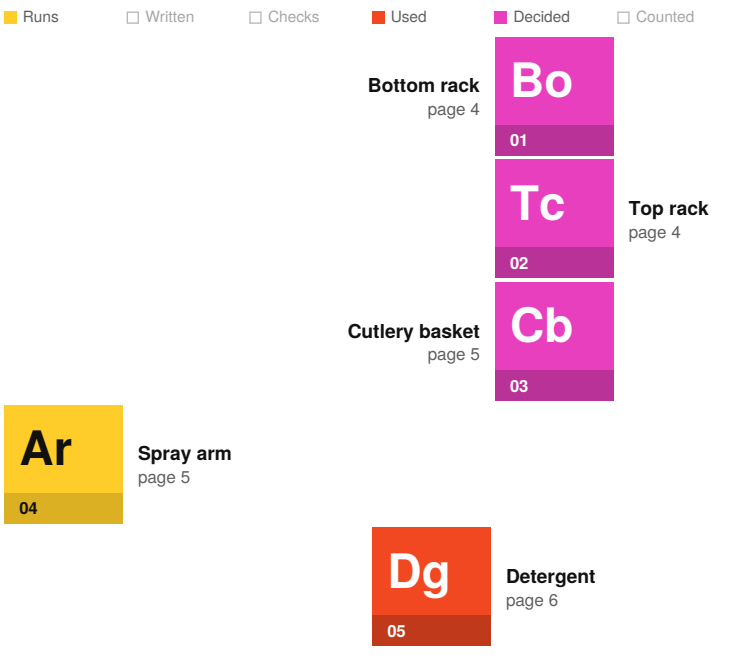
Loading a Dishwasher

A pocket-sized guide to loading a dishwasher, and settling the arguments about it.



My friend has a lot of questions.

friend@accidental.info · October 2026 · Version 0.6.0

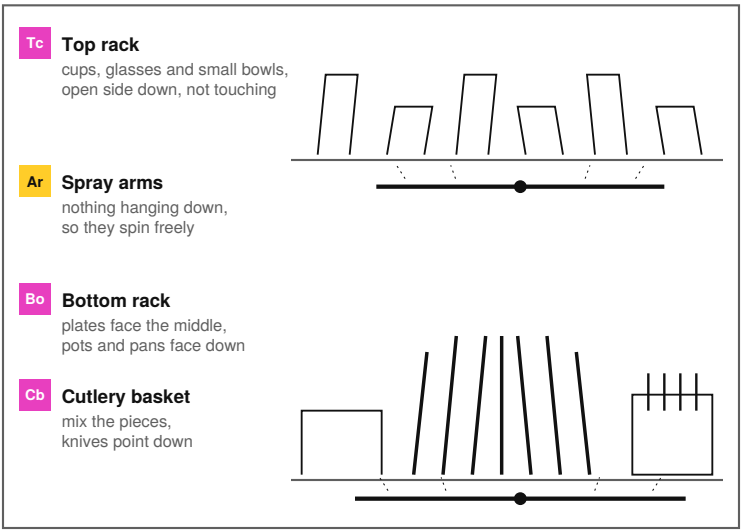
Is there a right way to load a dishwasher?

There is a right way to load a dishwasher, and the people who make them mostly agree on it, which is more than can be said for some kitchens. Water sprays up from an arm under each rack, so a dish comes clean when its dirty side faces the spray and nothing blocks the way.

The makers disagree on a few details, such as cutlery and glasses. When they do, your own dishwasher's manual wins.

Bottom rack	The lower rack, for plates, pots, pans and big items.
Top rack	The upper rack, for cups, glasses, small bowls and plastics.
Cutlery basket	The basket that holds knives, forks and spoons upright.
Spray arm	The turning arm under a rack that sprays water up.
Detergent	What goes in the dispenser and breaks down food.

Where does everything go?



Put each item where water can reach its dirty side and drain away. Before you start, check that nothing blocks the detergent dispenser or stops a spray arm turning.

Tip. Scrape off large bits of food, but don't rinse dishes under the tap. Rinsing adds water and energy, and most dishwasher detergents use enzymes to break down food.

Bottom rack

Bo
01

Identify by The lower of the two main racks.

What **The bottom rack holds plates, pots, pans and other large items.** Stand plates on their sides between the tines, facing the middle, and put pots and pans open side down.

So what **The bottom rack gets the strongest spray, so the dirtiest things go here.** Keep platters clear of the spray arm.

Field marks

Job	Watch for	Cannot
Hold big, dirty items.	**Blocking the dispenser.**	**Clean stacked dishes.**

Confused with

Tc **Top rack**

The bottom rack gets the strongest spray, for heavy and dirty things. The top rack is for small, light and delicate ones.

Top rack

Tc
02

Identify by The upper rack, for smaller items.

What **The top rack holds cups, glasses, small bowls and plastics.** Put them open side down, angled and apart.

So what **The top rack usually runs cooler, which keeps plastic from melting.** Makers differ on glasses in the bottom rack.

Field marks

Job	Watch for	Cannot
Hold small, light items.	**Glasses touching.**	**Save unsafe plastic.**

Confused with

Third rack

A third rack, on machines that have one, is a cutlery tray. Miele says to group the pieces in it by kind.

Cutlery basket

Cb
03

Identify by A basket with sections, in the bottom rack.

What **The cutlery basket holds knives, forks and spoons upright.** Mix the pieces so they don't nest, and most makers say knives point down.

So what **Makers split on forks and spoons.** Miele says handles up is safer for knives and forks, and handles down cleans better.

Field marks

Job	Watch for	Cannot
Hold cutlery upright.	**Spoons nesting.**	**End the argument.**

Confused with **Silverware basket**
A silverware basket is the same thing. Many US manuals use that name, so look for either in yours.

Spray arm

Ar
04

Identify by The turning arm under each rack.

What **The spray arm turns under a rack and sprays wash water up through it.** Each arm needs room to turn.

So what **A pan handle or utensil hanging through a rack can stop an arm.** Turn each spray arm by hand before you start, to check that it spins.

Field marks

Job	Watch for	Cannot
Spray water at dishes.	**Tall or hanging items.**	**Reach blocked surfaces.**

Confused with **Filter**
The spray arm moves water around the dishwasher. The filter catches food from that water and needs cleaning regularly.

Detergent

Dg
05

Identify by	A pod, tablet, powder or gel in the door dispenser.
What	**Most dishwasher detergents use enzymes to break down starch and protein.** One tablet or pod is enough.
So what	**Put it in the dispenser and close the lid.** Never use hand dish soap, which foams too much.

Field marks

Job	Watch for	Cannot
Break down food.	**Hand dish soap.**	**Escape a blocked lid.**

Confused with	**Rinse aid** Detergent removes food during washing. Rinse aid helps water drain off, which improves drying and reduces spots.

The usual arguments

Rinse first?	No. Scrape off food and skip the tap. If dishes will sit overnight, run the dishwasher's rinse cycle instead.
Knives, forks and spoons up or down?	Most makers say knives point down. Mix the rest so nothing nests. Makers split on forks and spoons.
Pod in the dispenser or loose in the tub?	In the dispenser, with the lid closed.
Run it only when full?	When you can, since a dishwasher uses about the same water and energy either way. Leave room for the water to reach everything.
Run the hot tap first?	Whirlpool says yes, because cool water can mean a poor wash. Run the nearest hot tap until the water is hot.

When advice differs, your dishwasher's manual wins.

Sources

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Bo Tc Cb Ar Dg

An Accidental Guide to…

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A pocket-sized guide to loading a dishwasher, and settling the arguments about it.
Written and reviewed by a person. AI does the grunt work. Set in TeX Gyre Heros and Newsreader.
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