

SANTA BARBARA SOFT WASH

THE SANTA BARBARA HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

Black Streaks, Green Stains, and How to Get Rid of Them for Good

What is really growing on your home, why the cheapest cleaner is usually the most expensive mistake, and how to choose someone you can trust with your biggest investment.

By Zac, owner of Santa Barbara Soft Wash

Licensed CA contractor #1105057 · Insured \$2,000,000 · Bonded \$25,000 · SoftWash Systems, F9 & Good Stewards Certified Applicator · 4.9 stars, 40 reviews · Compass Montecito preferred cleaner

A quick note before you read

Two identical homes on the same street get their roofs cleaned the same week. One is spotless and protected for years. The other looks fine for a month, then the streaks come back worse, the landscaping dies, and the homeowner finds out the warranty is void. Same job, wildly different outcome. The only difference was who they hired.

I wrote this guide because most homeowners have never been told the truth about two things: what those dark streaks and green patches on your home actually are, and how little stands between a real professional and the person who shows up in an unmarked truck. There is almost nothing stopping anyone from renting a machine, printing a magnet, and calling themselves a pressure washing company tomorrow. That is who you are choosing between, and from the curb you cannot tell them apart.

I clean the outsides of homes for a living here in Santa Barbara. Roofs, stucco, driveways, gutters, windows. I have been called out to fix a lot of jobs that started as a cheap quote and ended as an expensive repair. It is almost always avoidable, and it almost always comes down to who was holding the wand.

So this is not a sales pitch. It is the explanation I wish every homeowner had before they picked up the phone. By the end you will understand what is growing on your home, why the popular fix so often makes it worse, and exactly how to tell a real professional from someone who will cost you far more than they quote.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Part One explains the problem. Part Two explains the right fix. Part Three makes you impossible to fool: who you are really choosing between, what a professional job looks like, and a one-page scorecard to hold any company up against, including me.

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01

What's Actually Happening to Your Home

Before you can fix the stains on your home, it helps to know what they are. The answer surprises most people, and it changes everything about how you should clean them.

The streaks on your roof are alive

Those black streaks running down your roof are not dirt. They are not soot, and they are not stains in the way you might think. They are a living colony, and they are feeding on your roof right now.

The dark streaks you see on asphalt shingle roofs all over Santa Barbara are a hardy blue green algae. Roofers and manufacturers know it by its scientific name, *Gloeocapsa magma*. It is an ancient organism, and it has a clever survival trick. It coats itself in a dark, hardened sheath to protect itself from the sun's UV rays. That protective coating is the black you see from the street.

Here is the part most homeowners never hear. It does not just sit on top of the shingle looking ugly. It eats. Asphalt shingles contain limestone filler, and this algae feeds on it. Alongside it come moss and lichen, which send root like filaments down into the surface, the way a tree root works its way into a concrete sidewalk and slowly breaks it apart. Nature designed these organisms to break big things down into soil. Your roof is just another meal.

THE SHORT VERSION

It is a living thing that spreads, and it is digesting your roof.

Which is exactly why rinsing it, scrubbing it, or blasting it does not make it stay gone.

Why it shows up here, and why on that side of the house

This algae needs moisture and mild temperatures to thrive, and its main water source is simple: dew. Our marine layer and coastal fog roll in overnight and leave every roof damp by morning. That is close to a perfect climate for it. You will almost always see it worst on the north facing slopes and the shaded sections under trees, because those areas stay wet the longest and get the least drying sun.

It spreads, house to house

The reason your neighbor's roof and yours both went dark around the same time is not a coincidence. This algae releases spores that travel on the wind and on birds, land on a new roof, and take hold. One heavily infested roof on the block is quietly seeding every roof downwind of it. Left alone, a small shaded patch becomes full streaking across the whole slope.

Green patches on your stucco, the dark film on your north side walls, the slick coating on your walkway: same story, different organisms. Algae, mildew, moss, and lichen are all living growth. Understanding that one fact is the key to everything in the next two chapters, because it explains why the most common way people try to clean it is the worst thing you can do.

Why pressure washing makes it worse

If the growth on your home is alive, then the goal is not to move it. The goal is to kill it. This is the single thing pressure washing cannot do, and the reason it so often backfires.

Picture a weed in your garden. If you mow the top off, the weed looks gone for a week, then it grows right back from the root you left behind. A high pressure washer does exactly that to the growth on your home. It blasts away the surface layer so the roof or wall looks clean the day the crew leaves, but the roots stay behind. Within a season it returns, often worse, because the blasting spreads the spores across the rest of the surface.

Pressure washing gives the growth a haircut. It does not pull the weed.

On a roof, the damage is real

A shingle is protected by a layer of tiny mineral granules. Those granules are the shingle's sunscreen and its armor. High pressure strips them off by the thousands, and every granule lost is roof life lost. On top of that, spraying water up and under shingles can force moisture beneath them and around the nails.

This is not just my opinion. The Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association, which speaks for the companies that make your shingles, advises against high pressure on asphalt roofs. Many shingle warranties are voided outright if the roof has been pressure washed, so blasting your roof to clean it can cancel the very coverage that protects it.

On stucco, wood, and windows, it is no better

Santa Barbara is full of stucco and delicate surfaces, and they do not take kindly to force. High pressure chips and etches stucco, drives water behind it where mold can grow, splinters and furs up wood, and blows out the seals on double pane windows. Fixing any of these costs far more than the cleaning would have.

	High pressure washing	Soft washing
What it does to growth	Strips the top, leaves the roots	Kills it down to the root
How long it lasts	Weeks to a few months	4 to 6 times longer
Effect on the surface	Erodes granules, etches, fogs seals	Cleans without eroding
Right tool for	Bare concrete, paint prep, restoration	Roofs, stucco, siding, wood, windows

TO BE FAIR TO PRESSURE

Pressure washing is not evil. It is the right tool for a bare concrete driveway or prepping a surface to paint. The problem is using a demolition tool where a treatment is needed, and the lowest bidder often owns only that one tool.

What it costs to wait

A dark roof and a green wall are easy to put off. They do not leak, they do not beep, they just sit there. But the growth is working the whole time, and the bill for waiting shows up in ways most homeowners do not see coming.

It shortens the life of your roof

A roof is one of the most expensive things you will ever replace on your home. When algae, moss, and lichen are left to feed and root, they wear a roof out years ahead of schedule. Industry roofers will tell you that a neglected roof can give up five to ten years of service life compared to one that is kept clean. On a Santa Barbara roof, those lost years are measured in many thousands of dollars.

Your insurance company is looking

This one catches people off guard. Insurers increasingly use aerial and drone photos to inspect the roofs they cover, and a roof that looks dark and neglected from above can trigger a warning, a demand to clean or replace it, and in some cases a non renewal notice. A clean, documented roof is one of the cheapest ways to stay in good standing.

THE QUIET MATH

A cleaning is a fraction of a repaint, a re-roof, or a lapsed policy.

Almost everything the growth threatens costs many times more than removing the growth.

It bakes the roof from above

Dark growth makes a roof darker, and a darker roof absorbs more of the sun's heat. Day after day that heat bakes the shingles, aging the roof faster than it should on top of the growth already eating the surface. It shows up later as a roof that needs replacing years early.

It is a health and comfort issue

Mold, mildew, algae, and fungus are common allergy irritants that thrive in the damp, shaded spots around your home. Clearing them off your walls and walkways makes the space healthier to be in.

And when you sell, it shows

Curb appeal is not vanity, it is value. A buyer or their inspector sees a streaked roof and a grimy exterior and reads one word: neglect. A clean exterior tells the opposite story before anyone walks through the door, which is no accident a local brokerage named my company its preferred exterior cleaner.

None of this is meant to alarm you. The growth on your home is not a cosmetic annoyance you can ignore for years. It is a slow, compounding cost, and the good news is that the fix is straightforward. That is Part Two.

02

The Right Way to Clean It

If the problem is living growth, the fix is a treatment that kills it at the root instead of a blast that only moves it. Here is how it works, and what it means for every surface on your home.

What soft washing actually is

Soft washing sounds like a gentler version of pressure washing. It is actually a completely different approach. Pressure washing is a cleaning. Soft washing is a treatment.

Instead of relying on force, soft washing relies on the right solution to do the work. A specialized, biodegradable cleaning solution is applied at low pressure, about what comes out of your garden hose. It is not blasted on. It is laid down gently and given a few minutes to work. In that time it does what pressure never can: it kills the algae, mold, mildew, moss, and lichen down to the root and sanitizes the surface. Then it is rinsed, and the growth is gone. Actually gone, not relocated.

You are not removing a stain. You are killing what makes the stain.

That is the whole difference in one sentence.

Why it lasts so much longer

Because the growth is killed at the root, it does not simply spring back the way it does after a pressure wash. There is nothing left alive to regrow from. Any new growth has to start over from scratch, from new spores landing over time. That is why a soft wash lasts, on average, four to six times longer than pressure washing the same surface. You are not on a treadmill of cleaning the same roof every few months. You are buying real time.

THE HEADLINE NUMBER

Results last 4 to 6 times longer than pressure washing.

Kill the growth at the root and it stays gone far longer than blasting the surface ever could.

It uses far less water

Pressure washing works by blasting water continuously, so it runs the hose the entire job. Soft washing does the work with the solution, not the water, so it uses a fraction of the water a pressure wash would. In a place that takes its drought years seriously, that matters, and it is one more reason soft washing fits Santa Barbara so well.

"So you are spraying chemicals on my house?"

It is a fair question. The solutions used in professional soft washing are water based and biodegradable, and when applied correctly the growth is neutralized and the solution breaks down. The real risk is never the solution, it is careless application: too strong a mix, no plant protection, no rinsing. That is the whole reason training matters, which is what Part Three is about. Done right, your landscaping is protected before a drop is applied, and often left healthier than it was found.

You will occasionally meet a company that tries to scare you away from soft washing, usually because they own a pressure washer and nothing else. Now that you know how it works, you can judge that pitch on the facts. This is the method roofing manufacturers themselves recommend.

Your home, surface by surface

Every surface on your home grows something different and needs a different touch. Here is what is happening on each one and how it should be handled.

ROOF

Asphalt shingle and tile

Home to the black streak algae and, in shade, to moss and lichen that root into the surface. This is the highest stakes surface on your home and where pressure does the most damage. It should always be soft washed at low pressure and worked from a ladder, pole, or the ground, never by walking the roof. The treatment kills the growth and leaves the protective granules where they belong.

WALLS

Stucco, siding, and eaves

Our stucco holds a green or gray film on its shaded, damp sides. Stucco is porous and easy to etch, so it is a soft wash surface, never a high pressure one. The treatment lifts growth out of the texture without carving into it, and the shaded north walls that look dirtiest are where it makes the biggest difference.

FLATWORK

Driveways, patios, and flagstone

Concrete and stone grow a slick organic layer that causes dark patches and, when cleaned carelessly, the zebra striping you see on so many driveways. These hardy surfaces can take more, but they still clean best with an even surface cleaner rather than a hand waved wand, which is what leaves the stripes. Flagstone deserves a careful hand.

GUTTERS

Cleaning inside and brightening outside

Two different jobs. Inside, gutters need clearing so water drains. Outside, the face develops tiger striping, dark streaks of oxidation that plain washing will not touch. Removing them is a separate brightening treatment, and it is the detail that makes a whole house look freshly maintained.

WINDOWS

Glass and frames

Good window cleaning is not just soap and a squeegee. The professional approach uses purified water run through a filter that removes the minerals which cause spotting, so the glass dries with no streaks. It is also the safe way to reach second story glass without a ladder against your wall.

WOOD

Fences, decks, and shade structures

Wood needs the gentlest treatment of all. High pressure furs and gouges the grain. The right approach cleans the growth off, brings back the natural color, and finishes with a conditioner.

THE PATTERN TO NOTICE

Almost every surface on your home is a soft wash surface. If someone wants to put high pressure on your roof, stucco, wood, or windows, that alone tells you a lot.

03

Who You Let Onto Your Property

You now know the problem and the fix. This last part is about the choice itself: who you are really choosing between, what a professional job looks like, and how to compare any company on one page.

The part of this business nobody tells you

Here is the single most important fact in this guide. There is almost nothing stopping anyone from renting a machine, printing a magnet for their truck, and calling themselves a pressure washing company tomorrow. No license in their mind, no training, no insurance, no proof of anything. That is who you are choosing between, and you cannot tell from the curb.

A low bar, and a race to the bottom

Because the barrier to entry is so low, this market fills with operators competing on one thing only: price. The lowest bid usually wins the call. The trouble is that the things which make a job safe and lasting are exactly the things you cannot see in a quote: training, real insurance, the right method, genuine care for your property. So the cheapest number is usually cheap because a corner was cut, and the corners that get cut first are the ones that protect you.

Cheap is often the most expensive mistake

I get called out to fix these jobs. A rented machine on high pressure that stripped the granules off a roof and voided the warranty. Stucco etched and needing repair. A window seal blown out and fogged for good. Landscaping burned up by a solution mixed too strong with no plant protection. Every one of those repairs cost the homeowner far more than a proper cleaning would have. They paid twice, once for the cheap job and again to undo it.

The liability you never signed up for

Here is the part that surprises people most. If someone who is not carrying insurance is hurt on your property, or damages your home or a neighbor's, that can become your problem. Real liability insurance is not paperwork, it is the thing that stands between an accident and your bank account. It is worth asking who is actually up on that ladder over your roof, and what happens if they fall.

No paper trail, no recourse

When there is no license to look up, no documentation of the work, and no company that will still exist next season, you have no recourse when something goes wrong. They have your money, and you have a problem and no one to call.

TO BE CLEAR

There are good, honest operators in this town, and I am glad to share the market with them. The point is not that everyone with a truck is a risk. The point is that you cannot tell the difference from a flyer or a low price, so you verify. The next two chapters show you exactly how.

What a certified applicator is

In a trade almost anyone can enter with a rented machine, formal certification is one of the few things that truly separates a trained professional from someone guessing on your home. I am a certified applicator, and here is what that means for you.

Real training, not trial and error

I earned my certification through formal classroom coursework and hands on training, learning under instructors with decades of experience in this exact work. I did not learn by making mistakes on customers' houses. I learned the right way, in a structured program, from the people who set the standards for how it is done.

Trained across many surfaces and solutions

Certification covers a wide range of cleaning methods and detergents, each one matched to a specific surface and each one safe and recommended for use on building materials. That is why I can treat a delicate tile roof, porous stucco, aging wood, and hard concrete each in the way it actually needs, instead of pointing a single machine at everything.

Good Stewards certified detergents

I am also Good Stewards certified, so the solutions I put on your home are the best and safest biodegradable detergents the program approves. They are strong enough to kill the growth at the root and gentle enough for your landscaping, your pets, and your family, and they break down naturally instead of running off into the storm drains that lead to our coast.

Certification is not a sticker on a truck. It is proof that someone taught me how to protect your home before I ever pointed a hose at it. When you compare companies, ask who trained them, and what they were trained to do.



Who is actually coming to your home?

You are not just hiring a cleaning. You are deciding who walks your property, sees your routine, and stands at your door, often while you are not home. That decision deserves as much care as the work itself.

The question investigators ask

After a home is broken into, one of the first things police ask is who has had recent access to it, including contractors and service people. It is a fair question. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that in a large share of burglaries the offender knew the victim or the home, and most offenders live within a couple of miles. Criminals also routinely pose as workers to get a look inside.

Why it matters for an exterior cleaner

Cleaning the outside of your home means someone is on your property for hours, walking your gates, seeing your cameras and your habits, looking through your windows. In a trade almost anyone can enter with a rented machine, most homeowners have no idea who that person actually is.

How I handle it

Every person who works on your home for Santa Barbara Soft Wash is background-checked through a third-party screening service, so you know the people on your property have no criminal history. It is one more reason the license, the insurance, and the training matter. Together they are proof of exactly who you are letting in.



Background-checked through a third-party screening service

What a professional job actually looks like

Once you have seen how a job should be run, you cannot unsee it. A real professional does two things a cheap operator does not: they protect your home before they start, and they leave you a record when they finish.

Before a drop of solution is applied

- **A walk of the property with you** to note problem areas and agree on what will and will not be touched.
- **A written pre inspection.** Existing issues get documented so there is a clear record of the home's condition before any work starts. This protects you as much as it protects me.
- **Plant and property protection.** Landscaping in the path of the work is soaked with water first so it cannot drink in anything else, sensitive plants are covered or rinsed, outdoor electrical is taped, and furniture and grills are moved or covered.

During the work

- **Low pressure and the correct solution strength,** matched to each surface rather than cranked up to save time.
- **Roofs worked from a ladder, pole, or the ground** wherever possible, not by walking across your shingles.
- **Landscaping rinsed as the work moves,** then rinsed and fed again at the end.

The proof you get to keep

This is where a professional and a guy with a sprayer part ways for good. A real job leaves a paper trail, and a paper trail is just another word for accountability.

- **Before and after photos,** so the result is documented, not just claimed. On roofs, an overhead view before we begin.
- **A Certificate of Compliance for roof cleanings:** a short written record showing your roof was cleaned to manufacturer specifications using the low pressure method the industry recommends. You can hand it to your insurance company if they ever ask about the condition of your roof.
- **An itemized invoice and receipt,** and a satisfaction guarantee in writing.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Plant and property damage is the number one avoidable complaint in this whole industry, and nearly all of it comes from skipping the steps above. The operator who cannot show you a license, proof of insurance, a written inspection, or a single before and after is asking you to take a great deal on faith.

Seven questions to ask before you hire anyone

Ask these seven questions of any company you consider, including me. The right answers are simple, specific, and given without hesitation. Vague answers are your warning.

1

Are you licensed, and what is your license number?

A real contractor has a number and will give it to you on the spot. A number you can look up is a number you can trust.

2

Are you insured and bonded, and for how much?

Ask for the actual coverage amount and proof of it. If a ladder goes through a window or a solution harms landscaping, insurance is what stands between you and the bill.

3

How do you protect my plants and property?

You want a specific plan: soak the landscaping first, cover or rinse sensitive plants, tape off electrical, rinse as they go. "We're careful" is not a plan.

4

Will you soft wash or pressure wash my roof and stucco?

The right answer is soft wash for both. If they want to put high pressure on a shingle roof or on stucco, you already know from this guide why that is a problem.

5

What do I get in writing when the job is done?

Look for a pre inspection, before and after photos, an itemized invoice, and for a roof, a certificate showing it was cleaned to manufacturer specifications.

6

What happens if something goes wrong?

Listen for a clear guarantee and a straight answer about how they make things right. Hesitation here tells you everything.

7

Can I see recent local reviews and before and after photos?

Real, recent, local proof. Not stock images, not a single testimonial from years ago.

The scorecard

You now know what to ask. Here is the whole comparison on one page, so you can hold any company up against it, including me. The gaps in the left column are not hypothetical. They are the exact reasons a cheap job goes wrong.

	The typical low-cost operator	Santa Barbara Soft Wash
State contractor license	Often none, or "not needed for washing"	Licensed CA contractor #1105057
Liability insurance	Often none or minimal	Insured to \$2,000,000
Bonded	Rarely	Bonded \$25,000
Method on roofs & stucco	Whatever is fastest, often high pressure	Always soft wash, worked off the roof
Certified applicator	Rarely, if ever certified	SoftWash Systems, F9 & Good Stewards certified
Background-checked	Usually unknown	Every person screened, no criminal history
Documents the job	No record	Pre inspection, before/after, roof compliance certificate
Protects your landscaping	Often overlooked	Soaked, covered, rinsed, and fed
If something goes wrong	Gone, no recourse	The Make It Right Promise, or your money back
Local track record	Hard to verify	4.9 stars, 40 reviews; Compass Montecito preferred cleaner

THE BOTTOM LINE

This is not about being the most expensive. It is about being the one you never have to worry about. When you add up the license, the insurance, the training, the documentation, and the track record, one column is simply the safe choice for the biggest investment you own.

THE LOGICAL CHOICE

Why homeowners across Santa Barbara call me

I'm Zac. I own and run Santa Barbara Soft Wash, and I clean the outsides of homes across Santa Barbara, Montecito, Hope Ranch, the Riviera, San Roque, the Mesa, Goleta, Carpinteria, and Summerland. Here is everything the scorecard was pointing at, in one place:

- **Licensed CA contractor #1105057**, insured to \$2,000,000, and bonded \$25,000
- **Certified applicator** with SoftWash Systems and F9, and Good Stewards certified for safe, biodegradable products
- **Every person on your property background-checked** through a third-party screening service
- **Every job documented:** pre inspection, before and after photos, and a roof Certificate of Compliance
- **4.9 stars across 40 Google reviews**, earned one home at a time
- **Compass Realty Montecito Preferred Exterior Cleaner**, 2025 and 2026
- **Backed by the Make It Right Promise:** if you're not happy, I make it right, or your money back

If you want a straight answer on what your home needs, call or text me and I'll take a look and send you a number. No pressure, and now you know exactly what questions to ask me.

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