

How To Clean Your Electric Drip Coffee Brewer

A few weeks ago my wife and I spent a night at the home of friends, a couple we have been close to for many years. They have an electric coffeemaker, a popular European brand with a glass carafe and heating element, but they are in the habit of transferring the brewed coffee to a thermal carafe when the brew cycle is complete. Being a coffee roaster I always come bearing some freshly roasted coffee I know our friends will enjoy.

When I awoke the next morning my friend had already made coffee, had transferred it to the thermal carafe, no doubt poured himself a cup and went up to his bedroom to exercise. I went into the kitchen, poured a cup each for my wife and me and sat down to enjoy it. However, it was pretty bad. Now, I am familiar with the coffee and know exactly how it tastes when prepared properly so my thoughts immediately turned to questions about how it was brewed. Before long the couple came downstairs and the four of us gathered at the breakfast table. A new pot of coffee was needed and its preparation was started. I watched the process get underway and nothing stood out as being overtly incorrect – about the right amount of coffee, ground about right, put into a goldfilter, the water measured, the start button pressed. A little while later the drip started and it slowly continued, and I mean slowly. By the time the pot had finished brewing nearly 35 minutes had elapsed! “Lou”, I said, “is that how long it usually takes to brew a pot?” Lou said, “Yeah. Why, is that bad?”

Well, yes it is bad for the coffee, how it tastes, how long it sits on that heating element and also how it may affect your digestion. And here’s why it took so long to brew. They have a well and hard water, not an uncommon situation. And no doubt when the brewer was new it brewed quickly. But, just as you fail to notice your kids growing while everyone around you, who sees them less frequently, say ‘my, how they have grown’, you may not notice the gradual slowing down of your brewer caused by the build up of minerals in the lining of the brewer’s plumbing. This slow, but sure arterial clogging is the culprit, and it can happen with city water too. The good news is that fixing it is pretty easy, as is preventing its recurrence.

To remove the mineral scale from the internal brewer plumbing make a mixture of one-part white vinegar to two parts water. Use your carafe to mix a batch to the capacity of the brewer and fill the tank with this mixture. In the filter basket do not place any coffee, but do put in the filter you normally use, preferably paper for this application. Put the carafe in place as usual. Start your brewer and let it run its full cycle. When the cycle completes you may notice your filter has captured particles, probably mineral-like in appearance. You may need to repeat this process once more depending on the severity of the buildup. Importantly, run at least two more batches using clean water only, to remove any residual vinegar.

So, back to the friend’s situation. A surprising amount of mineral deposits got removed and trapped in the filter basket. Their 35 minute beginning brew cycle was reduced to a normal range of less than 10 minutes – quite a difference. And, the next pot of our coffee was terrific. A clean brewer will work optimally and you will be rewarded with the best pot it can make.

Disclaimer: A white vinegar and water solution should do no harm to your brewer based on our experience; however, proceed at your own risk. We cannot be held responsible for any damage.