

PRESERVING TEXTILES

Caring for Your Fabrics and Collectibles

Preserving your fabrics and collectibles can be a fun and rewarding experience. Imagine the delight of generations to come as they look at Grandma's wedding gown or Uncle Ted's uniform carefully stored away. Fabrics can be easily damaged by insects, mold and excessive handling, as well as exposure to light, heat and humidity. As with all artifacts, preservation begins with proper storage.

STORAGE: Fabrics and collectibles should be stored in an environment that is consistently dark and cool with a moderate humidity. Avoid attics and basements as they can have extreme temperature and humidity changes. A temperature of 60-68°F in the summer with a relative humidity of 40-50% is best. Light exposure causes fading and deterioration, so fabrics should be protected from light by storing items in boxes and in an interior room, such as a closet.

HANDLING: Taking a few simple steps will help to protect and preserve your valuable items. The natural oils from your skin can stain fabrics, so wash and dry your hands thoroughly and frequently. Do not use hand lotions and keep fingernails trimmed. Remove any jewelry that could snag or rip the fabric. Cotton gloves will help keep items clean. Replace soiled gloves immediately—they can be washed and reused.

PESTS: The best way to prevent insect damage is to routinely clean your storage area. Mothballs and other chemicals are not recommended because they can damage fabrics and are toxic to humans. Cedar does not provide a safe, reliable deterrent to insects.

CLEANING: Modern garments, such as wedding gowns or christening gowns, are among the most common items to be preserved. They should be cleaned immediately after wearing because any soiling and/or stains will become more difficult to remove as they age. Most wedding gowns require dry cleaning. Use a reputable dry cleaner and request fresh or filtered solvent. Identify all the stains before treatment begins. Christening gowns and other textiles made of cotton, linen or synthetic blends may be washed. Follow the directions on the item's care label. When in doubt, it is safest to have the items dry cleaned.

Removing dust and particulates is vital for keeping a textile collection in good condition. All but the most fragile textiles can be safely vacuumed. Lay the textile on a covered support sheet, and cover with a clean screen. Using a handheld, low-power vacuum, pass the nozzle gently over the covered textile. Never vacuum the textile directly.

Cleaning is problematic for older, historic textiles. Washing and dry cleaning can subject a textile to stress and should only be done under the direction of a conservator.

REPAIR: If you have a new textile, a skilled seamstress may be able to make the required repairs. Older or historic textiles, however, should be reviewed by a conservator who has the experience and expertise to evaluate condition and recommend appropriate treatment. The American Institute for Conservation (www.conservation-us.org) offers a free referral service and will give you the names of textile conservators in your region.

LABELING: Label your storage box so you don't need to unwrap and handle fabrics unnecessarily.

PLASTICS: The plastic garment bags used by dry cleaners are not suitable for the long-term storage of valuable textiles. They release gases as they age, damaging the enclosed textiles. Plastic enclosures can also trap moisture, creating a humid microenvironment that promotes mold growth. There are some plastics that are inert and may be used safely for textile storage.



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Tyvek® is a spun-bonded olefin that is inert, pH neutral, nonabrasive and durable. It can be used to make garment bags or furniture covers. Polyethylene foam such as Ethafoam® provides excellent drawer padding or box lining for accessories. Polyester fiber batting is an alternative to interleaving tissue for padding. These materials must be covered with muslin when used as padding or lining. Archival polyester sheets can provide protective barriers in wooden storage. However, it has considerable static charge and should be kept away from direct contact with fragile textiles.

SELECTING STORAGE MATERIALS: Storage materials described as “buffered” have an alkaline substance, usually calcium carbonate, added as an alkaline reserve or buffer to counteract acids that may form in the material in the future. Buffered papers and boards should only be in contact with plant-based materials, such as undyed cotton and linen. Items that contain animal proteins, such as wool, silk, leather, feathers, pearls and some dyes, are best stored in unbuffered material to avoid damage. Since buffering agents don’t migrate, a buffered box can be used with an unbuffered tissue paper surrounding the item so it does not come in direct contact with the box.

The products in our preservation kits are acid-free, lignin-free and archival quality. The box may be buffered or unbuffered, depending on the kit, but the included tissue is unbuffered and safe for all textiles. If you are unsure of the fabric or dye, completely surround your item in the unbuffered tissue paper.

STORING LARGE FLAT FABRICS (Quilts, Shawls and Table Linens):

1. Select a box that fits in your storage space and minimizes folds.
2. Select an appropriate lining material: interleaving tissue or prewashed and ironed cotton sheeting. Line the box with this material. You may lightly pad the bottom of the box with polyester batting if the textile requires extra support.
3. Place the textile in the box and line folds with rolled interleaving tissue or polyester batting covered with tissue or muslin.
4. Fold the interleaving tissue over the top of the textile and close the box.
5. Label the box with information about the textiles stored inside of it.

CLOTHING AND COSTUMES:

1. Select a box that extends beyond the length of your garment.
2. Line and lightly pad the bottom of the box, extending the tissue around the edges of the box.
3. Gently lay the textile in the box.
4. Using abaca tissue, interleaving tissue or polyester batting, gently pad the interior of the costume and the skirt. Roll the tissue to fill out and support the bodice and sleeves.
5. It is important to avoid creasing the garment. Over time, it will become impossible to remove any creases.

GLOVES: Store gloves flat in archival boxes with lids. Abaca or unbuffered tissue can be tucked in the palm area for extra support, then wrap the glove in tissue.

SHOES: Shoes should be stored in archival boxes. Pad them with archival tissue or polyester batting for support. Shoes made of light material, such as slippers, should have a padding designed by a textile conservator.

HATS: Hats should be stored in boxes with lids. The hat should be supported with a hat mount stand or other support so it does not rest on its brim and the weight is not borne on the crown. Line the inside of the hat and the support with archival tissue or batting covered with tissue to form a base for the hat.

All products mentioned are available at Gaylord.com or in the [Gaylord Archival Catalog](#).