

How to Preserve Your Special Textiles

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We all have textile that we want to save. It's likely that your special pieces are as varied as mine. I have one of grandfather's bandannas, the family christening gown used first by my mother and most recently by a nephew, the plaid scarf I got from my sister for being her maid of honor, and my hooked rug that won a white ribbon at the state fair. Old linens and garments, as well as new pieces that you hope to pass down to future generations, can greatly benefit from some kind treatment.

Unfortunately, textiles are fragile and they will deteriorate gradually over time. Although you can't stop the deterioration, there are several easy things you can do to slow it down to help preserve your textiles.

DON'T leave your textiles in direct sunlight. Light will fade colors and it will also weaken fibers. DO display your textiles on north-facing walls or in a darker room. When you have pieces framed ask for "museum glass" or Plexiglas, which filters the harmful UV rays of light.

DON'T use nails or tacks to hang your quilts. DO sew a muslin sleeve to the back to hold a pole. Or display the quilt over a piece of furniture, such as a bed or couch.

DON'T store your textiles in plastic. Textiles need to have fresh air so mold and mildew will not grow. Plastic can break down and cause textiles to yellow and deteriorate. DO wrap textiles in an old, clean sheet or some washed muslin before storing them. Pillow cases work very well for smaller items.

DON'T store your textiles in direct contact with wood, cardboard, or paper. These materials are full of acid, which will migrate onto the textile causing them to become yellow and brittle. DO use an "acid-free" box, or put a layer of aluminum foil in drawers and boxes to act as an acid barrier. Add an old, clean sheet or washed muslin for additional protection.

DON'T store textiles in a hot, cold, or damp environment such as attics and basements. DO preserve your special textiles in the part of the house where you live such as a bedroom. Ideal conditions are dark, 60 to 75 degrees, and about 50% humidity.

DON'T ignore pieces in storage. DO check them yearly for evidence of insects, mildew, and deterioration. Prevention is the best cure for insect problems. Watch for sharp-edged holes or webby traces. DO carefully clean the textiles with the nozzle attachment of your vacuum. Cedar blocks and moth balls (with *naphthalene*) can help discourage pests, but only moth crystals (with *paradichlorobenzene*) will kill eggs, larvae, and insects.

DON'T put fragile textiles in the washing machine. If you want to wash them, DO so them by hand in the sink. Use Orvus (also sold as Quilt Soap) or Ivory Dishwashing Liquid and warm water. Check colored threads to make sure they won't bleed in the wash by putting a drop of soapy water on the back of the textile on each color. Press a white cloth to the drop for a minute. If there is no color on the blotter, you can continue. Use a half teaspoon of detergent for each

gallon of water. Wash gently and rinse well. If you have very hard water or softened water, consider using distilled for the rinses. Lay the textile on a towel to air dry.

DON'T use chlorine bleach (Clorox, Hilex) on old textiles. DO use only safe bleaches. For textiles with food or baby stains, use sodium perborate (Biz) as a pre-wash. Follow the directions on the package, then wash and rinse well. For pieces that are yellow or gray, hydrogen peroxide is the best choice. After you have washed and rinsed your textile, and while it is still damp, put in your textile in a bowl that has equal amounts of hydrogen peroxide and water. When the textile is saturated, gently fold the textile and place it in a clear plastic bag. Seal the bag and leave it overnight. Remove the textile, rinse well, and air dry.

DO consult a textile conservator before attempting major repairs. Often the best treatment is no treatment.

DO enjoy your special textiles. Use them, share them, and preserve them.

Resources

Safe storage supplies

*discount for IMA members

Gaylord*

800-448-6160

www.gaylord.com

HangerBee*

630-220-0730

www.hangerbee.com

Hollinger Metal Edge

800-862-2228 and 800-634-0491

www.hollingermetaledge.com

Light Impressions

800-975-6429

www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

University Products

800-628-1912

www.universityproducts.com

Conservation services, disaster planning

Iowa Museum Association

www.iowamuseums.org

319-239-2236