

Storing Quilts and Fabric Victoria White, [The Secret Workshop](#)

For anyone who has received or created a quilt, ensuring it remains undamaged in it's original condition can be a concern. The same is true for your fabric stash. Care and storage techniques will affect the long term condition of the quilts and fabric in general.

Items being packed away for storage must be clean. No matter how carefully you pack your quilt, dirt and residue will cause damage. The longer a mark or stain remains within a fabric, the harder it will be to remove. Often times, a stain in fabric is difficult to see. Just because a quilt or fabric looks clean does not necessarily mean it is. A sugar-based stain will dry clear but turn brown over time. Oils and perspiration from our bodies as well as cosmetics and lotions can oxidize within the fabric over time, damaging the fibers. Once your quilt is clean, there are three factors to consider when it comes to determining the best place to store your quilts. These are light, temperature/humidity, and pollinates.

Light or lack of light is very important. Light, especially ultraviolet light, damages the fibers within fabric. Colors can fade and whites turn yellow. Controlling the amount of light your stored quilt will be subjected to is essential. This does not mean that you must keep your quilt in the dark forever - simply be aware of the impact of light when storing or displaying your quilt. Storing a quilt in a dark area will protect the fabric, and increase it's longevity. By keeping the quilt in dark storage when not in use, the small amounts of indirect light the quilt receives when you have it out will be relatively harmless.

Temperature and humidity together play an important role in the long term care of your quilt. Any fabric should always be stored in an area that has both an even temperature and humidity level. Basements, attics, and the garage are among the worst possible places for storing fabrics and quilts. These areas often experience extreme temperature variations. Humidity is the element that actually causes damage to the fibers, and humidity is directly related to the temperature within an area. The air in any area holds water vapor, and the amount of water vapor in the air depends on the temperature. The warmer the temperature, the more water vapor the air is able to hold. If the temperature in the area you are storing a quilt or fabric becomes too high, water vapor in the air can increase and cause mold to grow and fabric dyes to break down. When the temperature drops too low, the air can only hold a small amount of water vapor, causing the individual fibers in the fabric to dry out and become brittle and even break.

Water vapor is not the only enemy that travels through the air. Pollinates within the air are another important consideration when storing your quilt and are another reason why it is important that your quilt is clean prior to storage. Dust and dirt can lodge within the fibers of the fabric. These small particulars are abrasive and can cut and damage the individual fibers. In addition to the damage dust and dirt can do directly, these pollinates can also attract bugs and insects to the fabric. Mold spores also travel through the air and can get into layers within the fibers, waiting for ideal conditions to grow.

Once you have selected a suitable location to store your quilt, packing or wrapping it for storage is very important. You want your quilt to be able to breath. Placing a quilt within a sealed bag of any type can result in the quilt becoming damaged or destroyed. The air within the bag is unable to be released, leading to increased temperature and humidity within the bag. This can actually causing your quilt to become damp - a wonderful breeding ground for mold and mildew.

Quilts are best rolled on rolls or boxed for storage. Regular packing boxes are not recommended as the ideal material for storage. These boxes contain acids that can cause staining and a general deterioration of the fabric. All textiles should be stored in acid-free boxes or rolled with acid-free paper. Never use tissue paper. Acid-free boxes and paper can be expensive but will always be less costly than the loss of a precious quilt. Other types of material that can be used for storage are muslin, clean and well rinsed (not beached) cotton sheets or cloth, or Tyvek®. Tyvek® is a high-tech fabric produced by DuPont. This fabric is wonderful for storing textiles for numerous reasons. Tyvek® is breathable and provides protection from weather, light, moisture and pollinates. It is strong, lightweight and durable. It is able to block out 99.8% of the UV rays in light. Using Tyvek® to wrap or roll a quilt or fabric in will help protect the fibers in the quilt.

Rolling your quilt onto a tube is the ideal storage choice. If the tube is not acid-free, cover the cardboard roll first with acid-free paper, or cotton cloth. Taking the quilt, roll onto the tube with the right side facing out. Cover with a cotton sheet or cloth. If it is not possible to store the quilt rolled onto a tube, boxing would be the next best choice. As much as is practical, avoid folding your quilt. Folds can place permanent creases within fabric that are impossible to remove. Folding can also stretch the individual stitches and fibers within the quilt. If you have to fold your quilt, pad the underside of the fold to make a relaxed fold, avoiding any sharp folds. Stored quilts that have been folded should be unfolded and inspected for damage at least once a year. Never place the fabric in direct contact with wood.

You can increase the life of your quilt (or any other fabric) by taking a bit of time to properly prepare it for storage and ensuring it is kept in the best possible storage environment. By making sure your quilt is clean, that your hands are oil and lotion free when handling and choosing the best possible environment for storage, you will have gone a long way to ensuring that you have a treasure that can be passed from generation to generation.

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