

# STORING QUILTS

## What to avoid in storing a quilt (or *any* important textile!):

**Extremes of humidity and temperature.** Textiles like the same temperatures and relative humidity as we do. While lower temperatures are not usually a problem for textiles, uncontrolled temperature extremes experienced in attics, basements, garages, and other outbuildings are not good for storing quilts. Relative humidity (RH) greater than or equal to about 65% will encourage the growth of mold and mildew; since mold spores are always present in the air, it is best to maintain storage areas at a lower humidity. RH as close to 50% as possible is preferred.

**Stability of temperature and relative humidity is more important than the exact values, as long as RH is below 65%. Store quilts where they will not experience rapid swings in environmental conditions.**

**Storage in plastic.** Plastic lacks breathability and can form trapped microclimates that can support mold growth. Some plastics off-gas volatile compounds or bleed plasticizers onto textiles.

**Exposure to light.** Light causes textile dyes to fade and undyed textiles to bleach or darken, and can also be a catalyst for deterioration of silks. Light damage is cumulative and irreversible.

**Dust and other soils.** The mineral content of dusts can penetrate fabrics and act as microscopic "saws" to abrade them as fibers swell and shrink over time. Organic content of household dust and of other soils can stain fabrics and provide a food source to attract insects.

**Insects and other pests.** All quilts should be stored as clean as possible, in a location where the presence of insects and rodent pests can be monitored.

**Volatile and acidic compounds released from wood and non-archival paper products.** These can cause staining and degradation of fabrics. Barrier layers and/or acid-free and lignin-free papers and boxes should be used for storage.

## STORING YOUR QUILT

**On the Bed:** Quilts are best stored flat on a bed. Several quilts can be stacked on top of one another, because the weight is distributed evenly and air can circulate around them. They should be covered with a clean sheet to protect them from dust and light and rotated every few months.

**Folded:** To fold a quilt, place a cotton sheet on a clean floor. **Lay the quilt face down.** Determine how wide and long the folded quilt must be to fit in its storage box, leaving enough room for air circulation. Roll up a generous amount of acid-free paper\* into "sausages" and lay into each crease as you fold. This helps prevent deterioration along crease lines. Line the storage box with a layer of tissue or a sling of washed muslin, and place the folded quilt inside. If there is room for more than one quilt, add a layer of tissue or muslin between them, so that the one on top can be removed without disturbing the one below it.

In the absence of acid-free tissue, quilts may be stored temporarily in cotton pillowcases or cotton bags if they are large enough. Do not over-stuff; quilts need air.

If acid-free boxes are not available, wooden drawers can be lined with a barrier layer of a material such as Tyvek®. Woods release fewer damaging compounds as they age, so a very old set of wooden drawers will be safer than a new piece of furniture. A **template for making drawer liners** is available from Museum Textile Services here:

[http://www.museumtextiles.com/uploads/7/8/9/0/7890082/template\\_for\\_an\\_archival\\_drawer\\_liner.pdf](http://www.museumtextiles.com/uploads/7/8/9/0/7890082/template_for_an_archival_drawer_liner.pdf)

If folded quilts must be stacked on shelves, don't place more than three or four in a stack and cover the stack with washed muslin or a sheet. Rotate the quilts' positions in the stack every few months. Refold once or twice a year.

**Rolled:** Very sturdy and very flat quilts may be stored rolled, on a **large-diameter acid-free** tube to minimize curvature. The tube should be long enough to protrude beyond the ends of the quilt, and covered with acid-free tissue. Quilts should be rolled with the back face against the tube. Rolled textiles can be wrapped in muslin and/or Tyvek® and stored on blocks or on a rack that contacts only the uncovered ends of the support tube.

**See Ann Frisina, textile conservator at the Minnesota History Center, demonstrate quilt storage!**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PZTx\\_MUBgw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PZTx_MUBgw)



**Ann demonstrates rolled storage of a rug:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiJz7-mzzxM&list=PLC43D3C807A39A3FC&index=6>



**Jane Henderson shows how to make tissue sausages:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnE4\\_kBfr0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnE4_kBfr0g)

Check the **Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute** website for storage advice:

**How do I store antique textiles at home?**

<https://www.si.edu/faqs/antique-textile-storage>

**FAQ: Care of Victorian Silk Quilts and Slumber Throws**

<https://www.si.edu/faqs/quilt-care>

Sources for acid-free boxes and tissue paper:

Gaylord Archival <https://www.gaylord.com/>

University Products <https://www.universityproducts.com/>

Talas <https://www.talasonline.com/>

The Container Store (carries University Products boxes, and some acid-free tissue)

<https://www.containerstore.com/welcome.htm>

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