

Care and Storage of Quilts

HANGING:

Light: Sunlight, even indirect sunlight, can really fade the fabrics. Even the light from florescent lighting can be damaging to a quilt over time. The ultraviolet rays in daylight and fluorescent light break down fabric dyes and speed up the oxidation of fibers. Both sunlight and fluorescent lighting can be filtered by the use of ultra violet shields. Brown and black dyes, silks and other delicate fabrics are particularly sensitive to light. Incandescent lighting is less damaging, but should be used at low levels and at a distance away from the quilt to prevent damage (drying out) from heat radiation.

1. When handling quilts, wear clean gloves, preferably cotton, to prevent skin oils from damaging the quilts.
2. Quilts that are hanging should be rotated at least with every season.
3. Hung quilts should be rested periodically, because of the stress that occurs over extended lengths of time.
4. Quilts that are hung should be periodically GENTLY vacuumed to keep dust from damaging the fibers.

Temperature and Humidity: Position a quilt so air quality, temperature, and humidity are somewhat controlled. Avoid displaying a quilt on a damp wall or near kitchen cooking areas. Limit display time, especially if the quilt is old and worn. Changes in temperature can cause stress and deterioration of the fibres and excess heat will cause it to dry out.

STORAGE:

Keep a quilt dry. Find a place where the quilt will get good circulation of cool, dry air. Damp air and moisture can attract mold and mildew that will quickly rot the fibres in the fabric and ruin the quilt. By far the best place to store your quilts is by lying them FLAT on an unused bed with a cotton sheet on top. Or you could use wide tables or several deep shelves with a cotton sheet on the top of the tables/shelves and another for the top of the quilt.

A good option for quilt storage is to **roll them** and put them on a shelf. By rolling quilts instead of folding, you'll prevent creases from forming. Quilts can be rolled around cardboard tubes, but cover the tube with all-cotton cloth to prevent acid from the cardboard from touching your quilt. Or purchase acid-free cardboard tubes from an archival supply vendor. Rolled quilts require a little more room to store, but the results are worth it.

Folding quilts can cause deep creases that are unable to be removed. If you must fold a quilt for storage, folding them on the bias is the preferred way to do it. This helps prevent creases from forming. Then every few months you should make a point of unfolding the quilts and shaking them out to air them. Make sure when you put them back that you re-fold them in a different way to prevent creases that occur when a quilt is folded the same way all the time. *Refold quilts at least once a year (every 3 to 6 months is preferred).* Always place some crumpled *acid-free tissue paper* in the folds to pad it out and minimise creasing. Remember that creases tend to become permanent over time and the tissue paper will help the quilt keep its shape. It is important to use acid-free paper as conventional tissue-paper contains acids that will stain and corrode the quilt fabrics over time. Don't stack too many folded quilts on top of each other or else the weight of all of the quilts will create creases that are hard to get out. *For the same reason, unfold and refold quilts every 3-6 months to avoid severe creasing.*

Whichever way you store your quilts, be sure to cover the quilts with cotton.

All the comments about HANGING, regarding **heat, temperature, and humidity** apply to storing quilts as well. The temperature range for storing a quilt is ideal around 59 - 68°F/15 - 20°C, with humidity around 50 percent.

Plastics and Styrofoam should NOT BE USED for storage. They contain harmful vapors which contribute to the deterioration of the fabrics. **Wooden storage containers** should be sealed with a protective coating of polyurethane varnish, then lined with unbleached, washed muslin or acid-free paper. **Metal containers** should also be lined with this muslin or paper.

This paper is based on the experiences of the Kingston Heirloom Quilters and the following references.

References:

- 1) 6 Tips for Storing Quilts - <http://www.craftsy.com/blog/2013/08/6-tips-for-storing-quilts/>
- 2) The Care and Storage of Quilts - <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/factshts/CT-MMB-067.pdf> from the University of Kentucky – College of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service CT-MMB.067
- 3) How to Store a Quilt - <http://www.quilting101.com/care/quilt-storage>
- 4) Quilt Care - Michigan State University - <http://www.museum.msu.edu/glqc/quiltcare.html>