



CARING FOR FINE AND VINTAGE FABRICS

Fine and vintage linens, especially those made of 100% cotton or linen, or a cotton/linen blend, should be hand washed in cool water or in the washer using the very delicate or hand wash cycle. Very old or delicate linens should always be hand washed.

Wash your linens or other fine fabrics, using mild laundry soap such as Ivory Snow. After washing the linens and letting them damp dry, iron them, using a light spray of starch. A nice added touch for linens you use on a regular basis is to spray lightly with a scented Linen Water as you iron. (You'll also enjoy the ironing more!) If you are planning to store linens for a long time, use a second rinse and do not use starch and do not iron. Roll in acid-free paper or around a length of 100% cotton white muslin fabric that has been washed several times and rinsed thoroughly.

I soak linens in a large Rubbermaid "under the bed" container. Always use a clean plastic container. Rubbermaid containers work well as they are generally very smooth on the inside. The "under the bed" size will allow most linens or garments to lie flat enough to soak safely.

I have been successful in restoring a number of very old, much neglected linens, some so brown you could not be really sure what they were. If you have some very old and neglected linens, first soak them for two or three days in tepid water, pouring off the water every few hours or so during the day until the water is clear. Soaking not only loosens soil and stain, but allows the fibers to absorb needed moisture.

If the linens look reasonably clean at this point, wash them carefully in Ivory Snow or other mild soap and cool water. However, if discoloration and stains remain, then the next step is to use a sodium perborate-based product (usually labeled "vintage soak" or something similar) designed for cleaning vintage linens. The secret is slow and careful soaking over several days. Change the water and add more "soak" at least once each day or so. You can soak several fairly small items together. Large pieces of linen may require a washing machine, although only if you have a very gentle or hand wash cycle. Put smaller items in a mesh bag intended for use during a wash cycle. Rinse thoroughly. Line dry or lay flat. If you choose to put very sturdy linens in the dryer, avoid the use of fabric softeners, as these add a chemical to the fibers. When the weather allows, lay linens out in the sun for a few hours. The sun does seem to brighten white linens somewhat, but perhaps best of all, the combination of sun and fresh air will often banish the musty smell often found

in linens that have been stored for a long time. Linens with fragile trim need to be handled carefully. Always fully support fragile areas when lifting items out of water. Lay fragile garments such as Christening gown out on a white towel, carefully spread the gown out just a little, then lightly roll the towel, The towel will soak up the excess water. Then, transfer to a dry town, gently spread out, and let dry. Do not hang gowns to dry.

I prefer to store Christening gowns and other precious fabric things in 100 percent cotton muslin rather than acid-free tissue paper. I buy yards of inexpensive muslin and wash the muslin several times. I wash it first just when I'm doing regular laundry such as white towels, etc. This gets all of the chemicals out of the muslin. Then I wash the muslin by itself one time with a mild soap such as Ivory Snow and two rinses, then once on the regular wash cycle without any detergent. This assures me that all chemicals are out of the fabric.

Spread the muslin out on a bed, lay the Christening gown (not ironed) or other special item on the fabric, fold the sides of the muslin up over the gown, roll up lightly, and store in a drawer (do NOT store in plastic) at normal room temperature (no cedar chests!). Once a year, take it out of the drawer, refold the gown, and roll back up. About every three years, wash the gown as you did before (including the muslin) and repeat. The secret is to have the fabric very clean and free of chemicals, stored where they don't actually touch wood, and occasionally changing the location of the folds. If you have a bonnet, wash it just as you do the gown.

When the time comes for the gown or linens to be used, soak in clear water, then clean with a mild soap such as Ivory Snow.

If I can ever be of help, do not hesitate to e-mail or call:

Shirley Schooley

shirley@simplywonderfulthings.com

205-978-1825