

# PAT FERGUSON

QUILTER/ TEACHER

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## QUILT CARE & STORAGE

This information is geared toward quilters, non quilters, quilt lovers & collectors or anyone who owns fine linens and vintage clothing.

Even if you don't own a quilt, chances are you own some vintage clothing, fine linens, grandma's doilies or a baptism or wedding gown that you need to store properly and preserve.

Whether you store in an acid free box, a fabric bag or on a closet shelf, there are some guidelines to follow to extend the life of these pieces for future generations.

### **NEVER STORE IN PLASTIC!!!**

Store in **acid free boxes, new fabric bags**, or wrapped in a new clean sheet.

\* When storing your quilt you will want to avoid wrinkles and fold lines.

Fold quilt in half or thirds with layers of **acid free tissue** inside to fill out folds. Gently roll or fold with more tissue inside. Place your folded or rolled quilt into an acid free archival quality storage box that is lined with tissue. Do not overcrowd too many quilts in one box-leave some air space. Place a photo of the quilt on the outside of the box for identification. This is how the quilt museums store their valuable collections. If these boxes are too large for your storage space, new drawstring bags are also available. There is a pocket on the outside for identification.

### **Extend the life of your quilts**

- \* Avoid direct sunlight which will fade quilts and weaken the fabrics. Place UV coverage on your windows or close your shades.
- \*Store your quilts where you would live. If you attic is too hot and dry or your basement is too dusty and damp for you to live in, do not store your quilts or any textiles there. These poor conditions will weaken or deteriorate textiles.
- \*Quilts live longer in a smoke free environment. Harmful chemicals can build up in the fibers.
- \*The life of a quilt can also be extended by keeping pets off of them- consider making your pets their own special quilt

### **New Quilts**

- \* Most new quilts are made of pre-washed 100% cotton fabrics and can be machine washed and machine dried. Wash on delicate cycle preferably in a tumble machine rather than an agitator. Use cool water with a mild detergent and never use bleach. Soaking is preferred over agitating- skip this cycle on your machine if you can. Spin on delicate.
  - \* If quilt is too big to fit in the washing machine, you may wash it by hand in the tub, letting it soak. After rinsing well, let the water drain and then blot quilt in large towels. Never try to pick up a quilt full of water. The weight of the water can stress the fabric and seams. If you have to, place a sheet under the quilt and lift it with the sheet.
  - \* It is recommended to wash quilts only once or twice per year. In between washings, airing outdoors in the shade will freshen it up.

### **Use only mild quilt soaps like Orvus or Quilt Care**

\*Dry on a low setting in the dryer. Do not over-dry. If you prefer not to use a dryer, you can dry quilt on a surface where the air can circulate around and under it or hang it over several clothes lines. If drying outdoors on the grass (it is said that the chlorophyll from the grass is a natural whitener and brightener) place a white sheet underneath and keep quilt in the shade. You may also want to protect it from birds or tree debris with another sheet ovetop.

\* A light steaming, if necessary, is O.K. but never press hard.

\* If you choose to have your quilt professionally cleaned ask that it be laundered separately.

**NEVER DRY CLEAN!!!** The chemicals are too harsh for the dyes in the cottons.

\* If quilt will be stored for long periods of time, airing and refolding in a different direction is recommended to prevent permanent folds and wear.

Try folding in thirds or even diagonally to prevent wear on the creases. If a quilt has wear in the folds it is usually evident in the center were it is repeatedly folded in half & in half again.

\*Consider making a square, non-directional quilt- it can be turned in any direction on the bed which will prolong its life and even out the wear.

### **OLD QUILTS**

\*Storage of older quilts and textiles is the same as for newer quilts. The older quilt may be more delicate and need extra tissue between the layers and to cushion any folds. Do not fold these quilts any more than necessary and avoid previous folds. Rolling on long fabric covered tubes also works well but takes up more space than most people have available.

\*Many older quilts are too delicate for daily use, but best for viewing only. It is preferable to enjoy these delicate ladies by draping them over a quilt rack, chair or bed with a clean piece of fabric underneath to prevent contact with woods & metals.

\*If you are collecting quilts, try to choose square , non-directional ones that have a more even wear pattern.

### **WASHING OLDER QUILTS**

Before you consider washing an older quilt, consider the condition of the quilt, the age of the quilt, the provenance (story) of the quilt and the value of the quilt.

Older quilts that are still in stable condition may be delicately washed by soaking in a tub lined with a sheet to pick up the quilt. Avoid wringing and dry flat.

**Use a mild quilt wash such as Orvus or Quilt Care.** If the quilt is yellowed or stained, try **Vintage Quilt Soak** to brighten the colors. **Never use bleach!**

If a quilt is not "valuable" it may be repaired by replacing worn fabrics. Keep in mind that adding any fabrics will update the quilt to the newest fabric, thereby decreasing its value. Always test fabrics for colorfastness with a cotton swab dipped in water, using a new swab for each fabric. Once the quilt is repaired and fabrics deemed colorfast it can then be gently washed.

If a quilt is valuable, or the fabric is at all brittle or fragile, or if the quilt needs repair, do not wash it. Seek a professional to repair or conserve it.

Conservation is a process that stops any further deterioration. This is what museums do with their quilt collections. Seams are repaired with 100% cotton thread. Fragile areas may be covered with bridal tulle to stabilize them while allowing the original fabric to be seen. No new fabrics are added. The quilt may then be carefully vacuumed in small sections with low suction through a fiberglass screen to remove any dust. This process is best done by a professional.

More info on quilt care & storage:

[www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

[www.textilemuseum.org](http://www.textilemuseum.org)

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