

STORING YOUR FIBERS

By Leef Bloomenstiel ©2002

As much attention should be given to the storage of your fibers as the growing and processing of them. You spend all that time and energy into preparing your fleeces, and spinning those gorgeous yarns, or even putting them into end pieces, that it does not make sense to stick them in a box and let the fiber hungry insects devour it! By taking a few extra precautions, you can do a better job of protecting your fibers while in storage.

For the most part, fiber hungry insects are more attracted to dirty fiber. Even dirty garments. So the first line of defense is to NEVER store dirty fiber! Only store clean garments that have been specifically treated for storage. Also, never store damp garments, they must be completely dry. Clean fiber is less likely to attract moths.

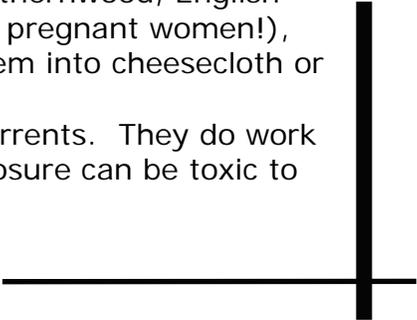
There are several ways to “moth-proof” your fibers before storage. This is only ONE step of many things that you should do in the process of protecting your fibers, as no one method is guaranteed.

1. After you have washed your fibers and you have done a good job of rinsing, you can add one more rinse cycle and in this water, add a few drops of a moth deterrent essential oil such as lavender, southernwood, rosemary, citronella, or pennyroyal.

NOTE: I usually stay away from pennyroyal, as you need to make sure it never comes in contact with anyone who is pregnant.!

2. There are several good wool wash agents, that I highly recommend. These moth-deterrent agents are used as a final wash, and there is no need for rinsing. You can find distributors of the following wash agents by doing a search through one of the internet search engines. Woodland Woolworks carries some of them. I've listed two of my favorites here:

- ***Eucalan Woolwash*** - use this as a wash cycle, and there is no rinsing necessary. Comes in two aromatic scents.
- ***Meadows Wool Wash*** - a wool wash and soak that does not need to be rinsed. Comes in several scents.

3. Once your fibers are completely dried, you can add some dry herbal sachets. Some good herbs you can grow EASILY in your garden for making herbal sachet packets are: Pyrethrum, Citronella, Tansy, Wormwood, Lavender, Southernwood, English Pennyroyal (be cautious here with handling this herb around pregnant women!), and Rosemary. You can harvest and dry your herbs and put them into cheesecloth or light linen bags.
 4. You can opt to use purchased mothball (naphthalene) type deterrents. They do work fairly well, but it has an usually strong odor, and long term exposure can be toxic to
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humans. PBD (paradichlorobenzene) can be toxic as well, and the crystals can soften or melt some types of plastics.

5. The use of cedar chest and hangers can help, but they do need to be reconditioned often by sanding or rubbing with a cedar essential oil, to renew the scent. Few cedar chest over 2 years old are capable of producing enough aromatic vapor to kill larvae. Cedar has no effect on carpet beetles.

There are several types of storage bags you can use, with some controversy over the use of plastics. I have never had a problem using plastics on completely DRY and CLEAN fiber. I would never store unwashed fiber in plastic. If you have to store dirty fleece, I would use 100% cotton pillow cases and seal the tops as well as you can.

If you are using plastic, be sure and get as much of the air out as possible.

I have used large plastic storage containers, along with good moth proofing techniques successfully. I also line the tops and bottoms with newspaper, as I have read that the ink in the newspaper will repel moths. I've seen no scientific study, but I know lots of fiber artists that use newsprint.

No one method is reliable, so you must establish a variety of tactics, and more importantly, INSPECT your stored fibers at least once a month. Remember, if you happen to SEE a wool moth, it does not mean you have an infestation, as it is not the moth, but the destructive larvae that comes from the eggs they lay in the wool. However, it IS a wake up call to start inspecting. You can go online and find many different photos of wool moths. They are very similar to meal moths, but smaller. Don't forget to familiarize yourself with carpet beetles. They are very damaging to fibers too. Many of the same control methods for clothes moths work for carpet beetles. These beetles will also infest and reproduce in areas of dirt and pet fibers.

WHAT TO DO WITH INFESTED FIBER —

Clothes moths are killed by heat exposure to 122°F for 11—14 minutes; or 140°F for as little as one minute. This kind of heat must be handled carefully as it could be damaging to fibers at much higher temps.

Putting infested, or suspected infested fibers into a plastic bag, squeezing out as much air as possible, and freezing in the freezer at temps of -4°F for at least 7 days will kill eggs and larvae. I recommend this method.

One of the best things for large fiber items such as rugs is to put them out in the hot UV sunlight. Beating and brushing the fibers for a good cleaning will help get rid of eggs and larvae.

It sounds like a lot to consider, but develop a strategy from the very beginning, working on the premise of PREVENTION tactics, that are easy for you to maintain. Do this, and the chances are that you will never have to fight an infestation!



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