

Using Archival Boxes

Many environmental aspects we encounter are of little consequence to us in our daily lives. The sun, for example, is usually a welcome visitor to our day. Spray cleaners are a necessity for keeping our house sanitary. To our mementos, papers, and photos, though, these aspects can have damaging, cumulative effects.

- UV rays of sunlight and florescent lights cause papers to yellow and photos to fade.
- Contact with harmful substances likes acids from cleaners cause brittleness in paper and tarnish in metals.
- Airborne particles, dust and dirt can scratch or soil paper, fabric, and pictures.

The answer, of course, is to store them away from these environmental rascals! But you have to be careful - what they are stored in could be as bad (or even worse) than not storing them at all. Some containers, for example, may use acid containing materials, such as some papers and plastics. This added acidity will accelerate the deterioration of your heirlooms. Papers, photos, and mementos should therefore be stored in archival boxes and containers. What is meant by archival?

- **Acid-free:** acidity relates to pH level. Acid free materials have a neutral or basic pH (7 or greater). Acids cause paper to deteriorate and become brittle
- **Lignin-free:** lignin is a chemical substance found in many plants. Since lignin is naturally occurring, all paper contains it unless the paper is chemically processed to remove it. Over time, lignin breaks down into acids.
- **Durable:** a box or container must be strong to withstand not only normal handling, but also stacking, dropping or other inadvertent actions.
- **Enclosed:** it is important that the archival box resist dust, dirt, and light infiltration, in other words, it should have a lid and bottom that are both used.

Once you have a good archival box, don't tuck it away in your attic. High temperature found in a summertime attic speeds up the deterioration of your heirlooms, even if they're in an archival box, as aging is a chemical process and temperature accelerates chemical reactions. Likewise, do not store them

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in your basement, as any dampness will promote mold growth. Keep them in your main living area, as this area does not experience the swings in temperature and humidity of a garage, attic, or basement.

For a bit of added protection, you can also put acid free tissue paper around your heirloom prior to putting it in the storage container.

Using archival boxes and storage containers, stored in a proper area, will allow your heirlooms to be enjoyed by future generations.

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