How to Wash and Store Hand-Dyed Textiles

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Read the illustrated guide

Check the care label before washing a hand-dyed piece. Learn when to finish a new dye project, how to spot rub-off, and how to dry and store the textile.

Check the care instructions for the whole piece

For a finished hand-dyed textile, use the maker's directions for washing and drying. Check both before you wet the piece. A plain cotton cloth may be washable, but a bag made from the same cloth can have a lining, stiffener, or leather trim that needs different care.

Sources: FTC — Clothing Care Labels

If the label allows machine washing, use the stated cycle, temperature, and drying method. If it calls for hand washing, use that method. When a lined, mounted, or fragile piece has no instructions, check with the maker or a textile conservator before putting it in water.

Sources: Canadian Conservation Institute — Basic Care for Textiles

Finish a new dye project before routine washing

If a class sample went home before its final rinse and wash, finish it using the instructor's or dye kit's directions. That wash removes dye left over from the process. A finished scarf or shirt already sold for use follows its own care label.

For example, Jacquard's indigo kit calls for rinsing and washing after the dyeing cycles. Dharma's fiber-reactive tie-dye instructions use a staged rinse followed by a hot washout. Those instructions belong to the specific dye processes. For a finished piece, use the water temperature on its care label.

Sources: Jacquard — Indigo Kit Quick Start, Dyeing Step 5 · Dharma Trading — Tie-Dye Instructions, Washout

Tell wash-water color from rub-off

If color enters the wash water, the dye is bleeding. If blue shows up where a dry or damp textile rubs against another surface, that is rub-off, also called crocking. For example, blue on the seat of a pale chair after sitting in dark denim points to contact transfer. Clear rinse water alone does not tell you how the cloth will behave against upholstery.

Sources: Levi's — Dark Denim and Dye Transfer

Follow any separate-wash instructions. If you find rub-off, keep the piece away from pale clothing and upholstery while you check the maker's advice. A photo of the mark and a note about where it appeared, whether the cloth was damp, and what you last washed it with will help the maker suggest a next step.

Support the cloth as it dries

Choose the drying method on the care label. In the photo, clips hold a small square cloth along its top edge. A wet knit has more weight to support, especially at the shoulders and sleeves.

Sources: Woolmark — How to Dry a Wool Sweater

Four clips hold the square cloth along its upper edge. Its moisture level is unknown. View the illustration in the online guide

For a washable wool sweater labeled for flat drying, lay it on a clean drying mesh or lint-free towel. Ease it back into shape and support the sleeves on the same surface. Dry it out of direct sun and away from heaters.

Sources: Woolmark — How to Dry a Wool Sweater

Illustration. The mesh supports the shoulders, body, and sleeves of a sweater labeled for flat drying. View the illustration in the online guide

Store it dry, with room at the folds

Before putting the piece away, feel the thickest seam, folded hem, and lining. They can still feel damp after the exposed surface has dried. Once the whole piece is dry, lay small flat textiles in a drawer or box away from direct light.

Sources: Canadian Conservation Institute — Basic Care for Textiles · Canadian Conservation Institute — Flat Storage for Textiles

If the box is too small for the piece to lie open, make as few folds as possible. For long-term storage of a delicate textile, support each bend with unbuffered acid-free tissue so the cloth curves around it. Keep heavy items off that fold.

Sources: Canadian Conservation Institute — Flat Storage for Textiles

Illustration. A tissue roll keeps the fold rounded inside the drawer. View the illustration in the online guide

References

- FTC — Clothing Care Labels
- Jacquard — Indigo Kit Quick Start, Dyeing Step 5
- Dharma Trading — Tie-Dye Instructions, Washout
- Levi’s — Dark Denim and Dye Transfer
- Woolmark — How to Dry a Wool Sweater
- Canadian Conservation Institute — Flat Storage for Textiles
- Canadian Conservation Institute — Basic Care for Textiles

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