



DECORATING TIPS

HOW TO CARE FOR SILVER

Now, as in the 18th century, silver objects are prized not only for their beauty, but also for the intrinsic worth of the metal. Usually alloyed with copper for hardness and strength, silver is manufactured in varying degrees of purity. Colonial settlers would have bought silver objects for all sorts of uses – flatware, hollowware, utensils for dining, coins, buckles, buttons, jewelry, mirrors, candlesticks, gun mounts, and many other domestic luxuries.

Silver is sensitive to environmental influences, which cause it to corrode or tarnish. There are several reasons for such deterioration, including moisture, everyday pollutants like sulfur and chlorine in the air, contact with sulfur-containing materials (such as rubber bands or glue), chloride-based plastics (PVCs or plastic wrap), and human perspiration. Those who live by the sea know that salt air causes metal to corrode, as does salt on the dining table. Silver will always tarnish to some extent with regular use, but attention to its care and storage makes it possible to preserve and enjoy silver pieces, both new and old.

TIPS ON CARING FOR SILVER

- Dust silver objects often with soft brushes, since dust attracts moisture and pollutants.
- If you need to wash a silver object, use hot distilled water and a mild detergent. Rinse and thoroughly dry it. (Distilled water has none of the damaging chemicals, like chlorides, found in tap water.)
- Some polishes can be detrimental and can cause wear and even perpetuate corrosion. Commercial antitarnish polishes can leave behind a film that eventually causes discoloration and streaking. These streaks can be removed only with highly abrasive polishes, which actually remove some of the metal. Commercial polishes can leave damaging residues in nooks and crannies. Seriously tarnished silver pieces require professional restoration. However, to remove light-duty tarnish, use the least abrasive compound possible, such as a precipitated chalk (whiting) mixed with distilled water into a paste. Be sure to remove all residues by rinsing in hot distilled water.
- If you display silver on wood furniture, create “coasters” by cutting circles of Mylar to protect the finish on the tabletop.
- When possible, store silver objects in closed cabinets, drawers, or cases to prevent air from tarnishing them. There are many products designed to keep your silver safe in storage, including silver cloth and

silver paper. Available at hardware stores, antiques dealers, or fabric stores, these products absorb harmful corrosive elements, principally sulfur.

- Store silver objects in areas of your home that have stable relative humidity and temperatures. Avoid keeping them in basements and attics or on mantels above operating fireplaces. Also avoid storing silver immediately above or below air vents, since both cold and warm air can cause condensation.
- Minimize the amount of exposure to intense light.

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