

Care of Cloth Dolls

Cleaning dolls can be difficult and problems can occur:

- Older dolls stuffed with Kapok, sawdust or foam chips, for example, do not wash well, as the stuffing materials clump together and the doll will not be the same shape afterwards.
- Felt deteriorates with washing.
- Wire, used for internal armatures, (including pipecleaners and chenille stems) will rust and leave the fabric brown and splotchy if it becomes damp or wet.
- If you spot-clean a cloth doll with a liquid/soap solution, it will sink into the filling and as it spreads back up it will darken the surface of the fabric in that area.
- Saliva is better than water for dissolving blood; so if you prick your finger whilst sewing, spit onto any blood spots *immediately!*
- Some faces may not be permanent and will run or become patchy if you use water or certain cleaners.
- Pure wool hair will shrink or matt. Some glued hair will fall out if it becomes wet, where the glue is a water-soluble variety and some may not be colourfast.
- Dust and dirt, that can rot the fibres, can be removed with gentle vacuuming or a quick tumble in the dryer on *gentle* setting. Place the doll inside a pillowcase first.
- Ornamental Collectable Dolls, made entirely from cloth, are not intended as toys, but are instead, intended to be posed in a display cabinet or on a shelf. They do not respond well to excessive handling. The clothing is attached or painted onto the doll and is not intended to be removed.
- All fabric deteriorates with age and is affected by strong daylight, which can bleach and discolour material, so bear this in mind when positioning your doll.
- Antique, collectible stuffed dolls should not be tampered with any more than *absolutely* necessary, since their value on the antique market can be significantly decreased.
- It is generally better to leave *faded fabric dolls* alone, since colour restoration will reduce their value and may look patchy. It may not really improve the doll's appearance anyway.

Fuller's Earth is a naturally occurring sedimentary clay composed mainly of alumina, silica, iron oxides, lime, magnesia, and water, in extremely variable proportions.

It was given its name several hundred years ago when wool textile workers or "Fullers" created a useful concoction to remove the dense oils from sheep's wool. This brew included water, urine, soapwort and an abundant "clay" that was readily available.

Because of its ability to literally soak up oil and remove dense properties from any given material, it was found to be a highly profitable and useful product for modern manufacturers.

Placing your cloth doll in a large plastic bag of *Fuller's Earth* and leaving it there for a few days (shaking it gently every now and then), may help to remove stains and dirt. You will then have to shake off the excess powder and gently vacuum the rest away.

<http://www.fishingwithstyle.co.uk/fullersearth.htm>

Cloth Doll Creations UK

Storing Dolls

Storing your dolls with *moth balls* should be *avoided* at all costs as the smell is so obnoxious and invasive. I have heard that being tempted to store your dolls in air-tight plastic bags or boxes should also be avoided because if there is any moisture in the bag or box, mould can form on the dolls.

Silica gel is a desiccant; adsorbing and holding water vapor is useful to place inside your storage box.

Silica packets are great for absorbing moisture when using sealed plastic bags or boxes, since the resulting lack of moisture can limit the growth of mold and reduce damage.

It is also good practice to store your dolls inside cloth bags with draw-string tops. You may then place them in the plastic boxes with lids and put **wrapped soap** or **herb sachets** in the box with them to deter insects including moths and spiders instead of the dreaded moth balls! If you are not using silica gel, make sure that there is ventilation so that air circulates into the bag or box.

<http://collectdolls.about.com/library/weekly/aa081800d.htm>

Link to a website with some useful information on textile doll restoration and conservation.

Modern nursery-style machine washable rag dolls will be stuffed with modern polyester fibre filling and made from cotton, calico cloth.

- Remove clothing and ribbons etc.
- Place naked doll inside pillowcase and sew or tie inside
- Wash at wool/synthetics setting.
- Dry on washing line, airing cupboard or on *gentle* heat in tumble dryer.
- Hand wash clothes separately, especially those where the colours are likely to run.

If you want your doll to last and be safe around children, think about using more robust materials like good quality calico, polyester stuffing, acrylic wools, embroidery silks and non-toxic fabric paints. Stuffing material that complies with safety standards also washes well and keeps its shape.