

SAIL STORAGE CARE BEST PRACTICES

BY CARL CRAAFORD



INSPECTION & CLEANING BEFORE STORAGE OR USE

- ✓ **Do a Full Visual Check:** Lay sails out completely. Look for holes, fraying, UV damage, loose stitching, wear around headboards, corners, batten pockets, and luff tapes.
- ✓ **Sniff Test:** A musty odour is often your first clue of mildew before you even see it.
- ✓ **Touch Test:** Run your fingers along seams and high-load areas. Soft spots, puckering, or cracking may indicate delamination or broken threads.
- ✓ **Salt Removal is Critical:** Light salt residue attracts moisture & mildew which weakens stitching over time.
- ✓ **Use Fresh Water Liberally:** Rinse sails thoroughly after your final sail or before first use. A hose-down of the mainsail hoisted or laid flat does the job.
- ✓ **Gentle Soap for Deep Cleaning:** For stubborn stains or bird droppings, use mild soap (like Woolite or dish cleaning liquid) with a soft scrubbing brush. Avoid detergents with bleach unless you're cleaning plain Dacron.
- ✓ **NEVER Use a Chlorinated Pool:** It may seem convenient, but pool chlorine will destroy stitching and coatings on both woven and laminated sails.



DRYING: NO SHORTCUTS HERE

- ✓ **Completely Dry Before Packing:** Slight dampness inside a sail bag creates the perfect mildew incubator.
- ✓ **Dry Spinnakers the Right Way:** Never flog them in the wind to dry. Lay them flat or hang in a shady spot.
- ✓ **Dry Naturally:** If possible, hoist sails in no breeze or spread out on a clean deck or dock in full sun.
- ✓ **Avoid Mechanical Heat:** Don't use heaters or dryers. Natural airflow or a Dehumidifier is best. Fans can help in humid areas.



REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE BEFORE STOWING

- ✓ **Fix While It's Fresh in Your Mind:** Address small issues now before they become mid-season failures.
- ✓ **DIY Repair Kit Essentials:** Include insignia cloth (sticky back), sailmaker's needles, waxed thread, shears, sail tape, and methylated spirits to prep surfaces.
- ✓ **Check UV Covers:** These are the sacrificial layers. If they're flaking or worn, get them replaced before they let the sun at your laminate or Dacron underneath.
- ✓ **Zippers & Hardware:** Clean, lubricate and inspect lazy jacks, stack pack zippers, sail bag closures, and furling drums.
- ✓ **Leech & Foot Lines:** Slacken tension to avoid damage while stored.



FOLDING, ROLLING & PACKING TECHNIQUES

- ✓ **Avoid Sharp Folds:** Folding on the same folds season after season weakens sailcloth—especially laminates. Change fold lines each time.
- ✓ **Rolling is Preferred for Laminates:** Roll gently to avoid creasing brittle films and fibre's.
- ✓ **Soft-Finish Dacron Can Be Flaked:** But even then, use wide folds and avoid stuffing into a bag.
- ✓ **Use Full-Length Sail Bags if Possible:** Preserve shape & condition which is better than tight, compressed packs.
- ✓ **Battens:** Remove if feasible. If left in, try and ease tension during storage.



THE IDEAL STORAGE ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ **Cool, Dry, Ventilated:** No hot attics, steamy lockers or leaky basements.
- ✓ **Avoid UV Exposure:** Store sails out of direct sunlight—even diffused light degrades fabrics slowly.
- ✓ **Hang if You Can:** Off the floor, using a wide diameter pipe or broom handle. Avoid folding if there's space to hang loosely.
- ✓ **Leave Bags Slightly Open:** Encourages airflow and reduces moisture buildup. Never seal in a vacuum bag.
- ✓ **Avoid Metal Contact:** Sails stored in contact with metal (rusty shelving, old anchors, fittings) can suffer staining and electrolysis over time.
- ✓ **Pest Prevention:** Mice, rats, and insects love warm, dark sail bags. Use traps, ultrasonic repellents, or cedar blocks if storing ashore or in a shed.





MATERIAL-SPECIFIC TIPS

Dacron

- Very durable but vulnerable to UV and mildew if neglected.
- Can tolerate light bleach (25% solution), but test on a small area first.
- Rinse hardware (rings, grommets, sliders) to prevent corrosion.

Laminates (Mylar, Carbon, Aramid Blends)

- Highest performing, least forgiving. Susceptible to cracking, delamination & UV degradation.
- NEVER bleach, fold on sharp lines, or leave salty.
- Roll carefully and store loosely.

Spinnakers (Nylon)

- Stretchy but prone to tearing under shock loads.
- The sail may bleed colour if stored wet.
- Always dry thoroughly. Pack loosely—avoid compression that damages coatings.



FINAL PRE-SEASON & POST-SEASON CHECKLIST

- ☐ Sails rinsed thoroughly with fresh water
- ☐ All sails 100% dry
- ☐ UV covers inspected or replaced
- ☐ Minor repairs completed or booked in
- ☐ Fold lines rotated or sails rolled loosely
- ☐ Stored off the ground, in a cool, dry place
- ☐ Bags labelled and left slightly open
- ☐ Mousetraps or pest deterrents in place

Proper sail storage doesn't just protect your gear—it protects your season. A few good habits now mean fewer headaches later, better performance, and longer life for your sail wardrobe. Whether you're heading into the season or out of it, treat your sails like gold and they'll return the favour.

— **Carl Crafoord**

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