

How to Keep Stamps Fine-and-Dandy!

Collecting stamps, for some people, is more than just a hobby—it's a lifestyle. In fact, the world has been witness to decades upon decades of stamp collecting. Case in point: the American Philatelic Society (APS) with its 44, 000 members—the biggest membership in the entire world—was founded as early as 1886.

The passion for collecting stamps is rooted in a variety of reasons. Some collect stamps because it helps them connect to a bigger historical identity of their country. Others collect stamps simply for their aesthetic value. Still others collect stamps because of its capacity to assist in educating people about history, culture, and events. Others partake in the tradition for the thrill of chasing that rare stamp, and at times, even gaining profit from the sales of a stamp that another collector is looking for.

However, the greatest challenge faced by collectors is the storage and care of these stamps. The storage of these stamps, first and foremost, will help in the manageability of the collection. A stamp collection that is well organized and catalogue provides the collector with much ease in monitoring what stamps he or she already has or otherwise, and locate duplicates that may be sold to other buyers who may be interested in the same design.

Moreover, stamp collections of huge volume are most preferably stored using minimal space, as much as possible; philatelists recommend that stamps are rather stored upright than laid out.

However, the most important of all is protecting the quality and longevity of the stamp. As they are, stamps are printed on paper and are therefore perishable. This subjects them to a huge variety of natural conditions that can make or break the worth of the stamp to the collector or future prospective buyers.

Protecting the stamp begins with proper handling; some professionals use tongs to handle stamps, keeping the natural oil found in the hands away from the stamp. This natural oil can corrode the stamp over time.

More importantly, stamp collectors face the greater challenge of protecting the stamps against natural conditions like moisture, dust, heat, decay, and the like.

The capacity of stamps to retain moisture that hastens the decaying process makes humid and warm places unfit for storage. Some of the places that must not be used to store these stamp collections include basements and attics that tend

to get extremely warm on some seasons.

In relation to moisture, heat has the very strong capacity to discolor and destroy the quality of the stamp. Continued exposure to the sun's rays and to heat will cause the colors to fade over time, making the design's details close to unnoticeable.

Dust and other dirt particles have the corrosive property of damaging the stamps. Moreover, dusts pose the threat of becoming smeared onto the face or design of the stamp, compromising the design centered on it.

As such, it is completely necessary to find adequate cases and storage solutions for stamp collections.

While waiting to transfer stamps into more permanent albums, philatelists recommend the use of glassine, a very thin transparent paper that protects stamps from dust and air. However, glassine must only be temporarily resorted to; it should be of primary importance to find a suitable album for stamps.

These albums, as much as possible, should be free from all forms of plasticizers. These plasticizers tend to chemically react to the components of the stamp, especially under high humidity and heat. The stamp may be completely ruined, or may stick to the album permanently if plasticizers are not avoided.

However, at the end of the day, an album is not sufficient protection for a stamp collection that spans a lifetime of years. Usually, collectors make their cases dust-free by putting albums inside dust covers before storing them; others store their stamp albums in cabinets with doors or glass covers to minimize any other ulterior exposure to dust.

While it is important to maintain stamps dust-free, it is also imperative that the stamps are not stored in an airtight container. Airtight containers leave no room for the stamp to 'breathe', and may cause accelerated aging to the stamp. In an airtight case, the stamp being protected from dust and moisture will most definitely turn to dust over the long run!