

About Mildew and Fabrics

SewGreen cannot accept donations of fabric, yarn, or other materials that are moldy or mildewed. A sour, musty odor is an indicator that mildew is present. Mildew is not only damaging to fabric, the mold spores that cause it are unhealthy for humans. Mold and mildew are common allergens and can trigger asthma attacks. Even people who do not ordinarily have allergies can have an adverse reaction to mold and mildew. Old cardboard boxes can carry mildew, as well, which is one reason we request that donations be delivered in clear plastic bags.

Here's some information about what mildew is, and how to prevent and eliminate it.

What is Mildew?

Mildew is a thin, whitish to bluish-green layer of growth produced by molds. Molds that cause mildew only need moisture and a certain temperature in order to grow. Molds that cause mildew flourish in areas that are damp, warm, or where air is not circulated, such as basements, crawl spaces, and closets. They also grow on draperies, rugs and shower curtains -- anything from which they can get enough food.

In addition to an unpleasant musty odor, molds and mildew cause considerable damage if permitted to grow. They discolor fabrics and sometimes cause the fabrics to rot and fall apart. Leather, paper and wood can also become discolored and damaged by mold and mildew.

How to Prevent It

Keep storage spaces clean

Keep closets, dresser drawers, basements — any place where mildew is likely to grow — as clean as possible. Clean articles before storing. Soil on articles can supply enough food for mildew to start growing when moisture and temperature are right. On warm, dry days, sun and air the articles stored in closets. Occasionally inspect cotton, rayon, leather, and woolen clothing stored in garment bags. A closed bag, dampness and hot weather make ideal growing conditions for molds.

Keep fabrics dry and clean.

Never let clothing or other fabric articles lie around damp or wet. Dry washed garments and fabrics thoroughly and quickly. Fabrics dried slowly may get sour and musty smelling — a sign of mold growth. Store your sewing fabrics on shelves in clean, dry, well-ventilated spaces, away from moisture and dampness.

Be aware of musty odors

Take special precautions to get rid of musty odors as soon as you notice them to prevent further objectionable and damaging mold growth. Usually musty odors disappear if the susceptible area is kept heated, ventilated and dry.

If things are kept in clean, well-ventilated and dry places, your chances of having mildew are greatly reduced.

How to Eliminate It

Sun and fresh air: The easiest cure is to simply hang fabrics outside in the sun and breeze until odors disappear.

Remove mildew spots as soon as you discover them. Brush off surface growth outdoors to prevent scattering the spores in the house. If any mildew spots remain, washable articles can be washed with soap and water, rinsed well and dried in the sun. If any stain remains, you can moisten it with lemon juice, spread on table salt and place in the sun to dry. Wash and rinse thoroughly. You may also try soaking the material briefly in a dilute chlorine bleach solution (two tablespoons of bleach in a quart of warm water). A follow-up soaking in weak vinegar (two tablespoons to a cup of water) will stop further bleach action.

***Mildewed fabric does not have to be thrown away!
Sun and fresh air are free and very effective cures for mildew and musty odors.***

References & Resources: Mildew Prevention and Removal, www.fcs.uga.edu/pubs/current/C767.html
How to Prevent and Remove Mildew, <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/GH5928>
Mold and Mildew: <http://healthandenergy.com/mold.htm>