

Storing Stamps and Covers

By Richard Pederson

One of the first things to confront each newcomer to the hobby is the question “How do I store and display the items that I collect?” There is no one correct answer and the options are partially driven by your collecting interests. Storage media include pre-printed albums, blank albums, stock books and cards, glassine envelopes, and sales/display books. The figure at the right shows a few of the many ways you can store your stamps. There are also specialized storage containers targeted towards specific types of philatelic items, such as plate blocks, mint sheets/panes, first day covers, and press sheets. No matter what type of collection you have, there are a few important considerations that should drive your selection. We will attempt to address each of these concerns below:



1. **Protection.** First, does the storage medium provide adequate protection for your collection? Stamps and covers are subject to damage from handling, humidity, exposure to light, exposure to insects, and chemicals contained in non-inert storage media. You want to choose a storage medium that minimizes the risk your philatelic items will be damaged when you store and look at them. For instance, if you use a stock book or an album page with stamp mounts, make certain that they are correctly sized. If you place a stamp in a mount that is too tight (i.e., not taller and wider than the stamp), you run a significant risk of bending perforations or creasing the stamp, thus significantly reducing its value and desirability as a collectable. If your item is stored in a way that exposes it to light (e.g., it is in a picture frame or under an exposed piece of glass) it may be subject to color changes or toning due to the light. Stamps that are exposed to humidity may adhere to the storage medium or adjacent stamps (for stamps overlapped in a stock book or other medium). Humidity can also cause damage due to mold and mildew. To prevent damage from humidity, choose a storage solution that keeps moisture out and be certain to keep your collection in an area with low to moderate humidity (i.e., not a basement unless dehumidifiers are in use). Storage media must also be made of ingredients that are of archival quality (i.e., are chemically inert) so that, over an extended period of time, you do not have to worry about chemicals from the storage media interacting with and

damaging your collection. Storage media should also keep out pests, such as insects (e.g., silverfish, crickets) that eat paper. If you cannot keep insect pests out, you need to make certain your home is treated to remove them.

2. **Ease of Access**. If your collection is not stored in a manner that allows you ready access to the contents, you are not likely to spend time working on and enjoying the collection. If it is a chore to look at your collection, what is the sense of maintaining it in the first place.
3. **Organization**. You need a storage medium (or media) that allows you to easily and quickly access any item(s) in your collection. This could be pre-printed album pages or glassine envelopes ordered by catalog number. The important thing is that your storage is structured in such a way that you can find what you are looking for while still allowing you to enjoy looking at your collection.
4. **Storage**. Not only does the storage medium have to provide a place for your stamps and/or covers, but it also must be a size and shape that will fit into the spot in your residence where you keep your stamps and covers. If you have a bookcase with 12 inches between shelves, you don't want to purchase albums or stock books that are 14 inches tall. If you do, you will be forced to lay them flat rather than stand them upright. This can increase the likelihood that stamps will stick to mounts or album/stock pages, due to the pressure from other pages and lack of air flow between pages.