

GARAGE SALES

Restoring Vintage Silver

We're a more casual society than we once were, and cases of fancy silver pieces often gather dust in attics and end up in garage sales, to say nothing of the random pieces that families have gathered over the years.

There's something to be said for turning these long-forgotten serving pieces into showpieces, though. Vintage silver makes a beautiful addition to any china cabinet. Here's how to restore and maintain silver.

ASSESSMENT

First of all, you should know that there is a case for keeping the patina as-is on silver and other metal items. A professional appraiser can help you determine whether polishing it would devalue it. If you aren't planning to sell it anytime soon, though, proceed in whatever way makes you happy.

CLEANING OFF THE TARNISH

You'll need salt and baking



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soda, a cup of each, for every gallon of water used. Choose a container large enough for the silver to lay flat and be covered in liquid.

Line the container with aluminum foil, shiny side up.

Sprinkle the salt and baking soda over the foil, pour in boiling water, and add the silver to the container. You'll notice that some of the tarnish starts to dissolve immediately.

For stubborn tarnish, add

more salt or baking soda or hot water. Make sure the silver is touching the foil. Once all the tarnish is gone (or as much is gone as you wanted), remove the pieces and wipe each one down with a soft rag.

If you see some dark spots that just won't budge, that might be a base metal peeking through silver plating.

Rinse your pieces with clean water and dry them well. Moisture can cause the tarnish to form more quickly.

POLISHING SILVER

To keep your pieces gleaming, Good Housekeeping recommends a commercial silver polish. Rub the polish on the piece in an up-and-down motion, not circular. Circles can cause fine scratches.

Keep turning your cloth as you work so that tarnish isn't put back on the piece. Wash the polished silver with a mild dish soap and rinse with warm water, then buff dry with a clean cloth.

STORAGE

Tarnish is a chemical reaction between the silver and compounds in the air around us. Silver pieces are going to tarnish, but there are ways you can slow the process. Store pieces in anti-tarnish bags in a cool, dry place. Add a piece of chalk to help absorb moisture. And don't be afraid to use it! Friction is the enemy of tarnish, so the more you handle silver pieces, the less tarnished they're liable to be.

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BUYER'S TIP

Get an Appraisal on Items of Value

If you suspect you have a particularly valuable piece, it's worth getting a professional appraisal before taking any more steps. It's possible the patina adds value. If it doesn't and you'd still like it cleaned, consider taking it to a jeweler or other professional to have it cleaned rather than risk damaging the object.

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