

Storing sterling silver jewelry

Storing your sterling silver in the open air and humidity for extended periods of time can cause it to tarnish quickly. Tarnish first appears as a golden hue then quickly turns to black. This is a normal process that is caused by oxidization and moisture from air and believe it or not sunshine. To keep tarnish to a minimum it is advised that you store your jewelry pieces when not wearing them.

To reduce tarnish and keep your pieces tarnish free for months at a time, it is recommended that you keep your sterling silver jewelry in an air-tight protective bag made of tarnish proof cloth or you can use a plastic zip lock bag made of Mylar (turkey cooking bags) or polyethylene (Like GLAD food storage bags). Never use polyvinyl plastic bags. Sterling silver, stored properly, can be worn often and with minimal cleaning required making it very easy to care for.

Although your jewelry is scratch resistant it isn't scratch proof, so we recommend that you store your jewelry so that it isn't rubbing up against other articles, like in a loose drawer or jewelry box. **Avoid storing your sterling silver jewelry directly on wood surfaces, because wood usually contains acids that can mar the finish.** Also, avoid storing your sterling silver with other metals, like pennies, and rubber, these too cause tarnish and damage.

Cleaning sterling silver jewelry

Clean your sterling silver jewelry with a soft 100% cotton (nub free) cloth or flannel cloth. Remember silver is a very soft metal and you can scratch it if you aren't careful so don't rub it too briskly. Never use anything but a clean 100% cotton or a special sterling silver cleaning cloth or very soft bristle brush, like a babies tooth brush or a horsehair silver brush. Paper, polyester, and coarse fabrics often contain wood fibers or synthetics that can cause tiny scratches in the surface.

For light cleanings: To remove light dirt, fingerprints or makeup just use a small amount of mild liquid detergent to a 1/2 cup of warm water and rinse thoroughly with clean fresh water. Dry it completely before storing it in an air tight zip lock bag. I usually do quick clean ups of my sterling silver jewelry with little effort using the Sunshine Polishing Cloth. Then just polish it up with a soft cotton cloth, an old cotton t-shirt works well. **Do not use the polishing cloth on your gemstones! The best use of the polishing cloth is to remove light scratches from regular wear and tear**

Should you have a great deal of tarnish and need more cleaning than a polishing cloth can do, you will probably have to do a deeper cleaning using a silver paste cleaner or a silver polish spray; and for the gemstones we recommend the [Hagerty Delicate Jewel Clean](#). Be careful silver paste cleaners can damage gemstones like turquoise, so be sure to try and keep it off of your gemstones when cleaning your sterling silver. If you use the Hagerty's Silversmith Wash we recommend you do not have to worry about your gemstones, this product is safe on porous stones and is made for this use. It also has a tarnish retardant in the cleaner to slow the tarnishing process down.

Not all paste cleaners are recommended for soft, porous gemstones, so **care must be taken to use the appropriate polish or cleanser that will not harm your gemstones.** [Hagerty's Silversmith's Wash](#) and [Hagerty Delicate Jewelry Clean](#) are good choices.. Hagerty's Wash is easy and quick and has a chemical retardant to put a protective barrier to help slow tarnish and really makes it shine! It is ideal for cleaning intricate patterns work. You use it with a sponge, soft cloth or soft bristle brush.

For deeper cleaning sterling silver without gemstones: We use and recommend [Hagerty Silversmiths' Spray Polish](#) because it is economical, non-abrasive, super easy to use, retards tarnish for months and really makes it shine! Using dip polish cleaners or pastes on sterling silver **without** gemstones is safe and will not harm your sterling silver. We use the [Hagerty's Flatware Dip](#) for cleaning all sterling silver pieces without gemstones or antiquing, such as liquid silver necklaces or earrings, it cleans in seconds, just dip and take them out and rinse. I do not believe that this has the tarnish retardant in there, but they clean so quickly I use it for these all silver items and keep all my jewelry stored in the [jewelry bag](#) or [jewelry keeper](#) to help keep them from tarnishing.

How to Clean:

Make sure you remove any trace of the polish from gemstones and rinse thoroughly with clean water.

Rub with a lengthwise motion, never clean in a circular motion because this may cause scratches. Many will leave the tarnish in the deep crevices to enhance the look of the piece. However, if you want to remove the tarnish to hard to reach areas, use a very soft brush like a child's tooth brush or a jewelry horse hair silver brush. A mushroom brush works well for this and can be found at most grocery stores. After cleaning with a silver polish, use a clean cloth to remove any residual cleaner from your jewelry.

Remember that all metal cleaners have some type of small abrasive particles that help them to clean and will inevitably cause some form of fine scratches. These are not that obvious and after a time will blend with the fine scratches just from wearing the piece and are not that obvious. They will still have a beautiful soft sheen.

Don't feel that you have to get every bit of tarnish from lines and crevices. Leaving some of the tarnish in hard to reach areas just adds definition and an antique look.

If you wear your sterling silver jewelry regularly, your body oils help to keep the tarnishing down and cleaning to a minimum.

Careful not to scratch the surface: The polished sheen was produced by the skilled hands of silversmiths that spent time filing, sanding and buffing the sterling silver piece to a perfectly flat surface. It is the light reflecting off this flat surface that gives it the shine. If you put tiny scratches into the surface you diminish the sheen because the light isn't able to bounce off the surface as well as it once did. So do protect your sterling silver jewelry from excessive scratches. If you have

pieces that have been abused and are terribly scratched, you should consult a bench jeweler to see if they can be re-polished to remove them and return it to its original or close to original luster.

To use baking soda or toothpaste or not: Using toothpaste or baking soda seems to be controversial. The argument is that the baking soda and toothpaste are too abrasive. Use at your own risk. I say if in doubt . . . don't. Therefore, I recommend against using them. Stick to a trusted silver cleaner. You would hate to have to have your pieces professionally buffed and refinished. Our preference is the Sunshine Polishing Cloth and Hagerty's Spray Polish or Wash Foam Cleanser. However, if you wish to use backing soda here is what you should do: Barely moisten your sterling silver jewelry with water. Place in the palm of your hand and pour a liberal amount of baking soda over your jewelry and rub gently with your fingertips. Continue doing this until you remove all the tarnish. Rinse with cool water and dry.

Toothpaste is mainly recommended for gold, not silver. Use an old soft toothbrush, dampen and scrub lengthwise as recommended to reduce the chance for scratches and marring the surface. Rinse in cool water. Remember that toothpaste has abrasive material in it.

Long term care of your jewelry adds to its life.

Unfortunately, everything changes with time, use and wear. Your sterling silver or beaded gemstone jewelry is no different. There are several things we recommend doing to help prolong the life of your jewelry.

1. **Keep them clean.** It is much easier to remove tarnish and soil when it is minimal. If you allow your jewelry to turn black with tarnish, it may damage the metal. The longer you go between cleanings the harder it is to restore it to its original luster. So best to keep it clean with a polishing cloth and to store in an air tight back, such as a zip-lock bag, to keep tarnish down. Or better yet wear them, this helps keep tarnish down. See the care and cleaning section above.
2. **Always remove your jewelry before using any product that contains bleach, ammonia, alcohol, fingernail polish removers that contain acetone, and turpentine.** Some of these can cause a breakdown in the metal alloys leaving your jewelry beyond repair and dull or even pit the surface of your gemstones.