

Christmas Cleanup

HOW TO STORE EVERYTHING, FROM A TO Z

We've all been there: You gingerly pull down box after box from the shelves in your basement, excited to decorate your house for the holidays, only to open one and find shards of your beloved—and now broken—ornaments rattling around in the bottom. To make sure that never happens again, follow this expert advice to the letter.



ANGEL TREE TOPPER: "Cover it with discarded wrapping paper saved from opening gifts," says Erin Doland, editor-in-chief of organization blog *Unclutterer.com*. Nestle carefully in a box or a bin, label and store in a cool, dry, mildew-free spot like a basement. (An attic can get steamy and damage delicate decorations.)

BLITZEN: See I, Inflatable Reindeer.



CANDLES: Wrap tapers in old tube socks, says Laura Leist, certified professional organizer and author of *Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life*. Make sure the socks are white—if the wax overheats from being stored somewhere too hot, dye could discolor the candles. Stand them up or stack them in boxes with your decorations.



DINNERWARE: Holiday-themed china is safest stored in padded, divided containers specially made for dishware. Try the 6-Piece Cotton China Storage Set, \$29.99; containerstore.com.

EVERGREEN, ARTIFICIAL: See T, Tree.



FAUX EVERGREEN GARLAND: Swags can be wrapped together with wreaths (see W). As for beaded garlands, zip them up in sandwich bags so they don't get tangled, says Andrew Mellen, professional organizer and author of *Untuff Your Life*.



GINGERBREAD HOUSE: If you can't bear to part with it, spray it with several coats of clear lacquer (available at hardware stores) to keep away insects and mold, then wrap it in plastic. Better yet, snap a digital picture of it for your scrapbook, says Doland, toss it out in the yard for the squirrels and make a new one next year.



HOLLY, ARTIFICIAL: Store with faux evergreen garlands.



INFLATABLE REINDEER/SANTA/SNOWMAN: Set it up in a basement or attic to dry for a week to prevent mildew, says Paul Craig. (He ought to know: He displays 200 inflatable penguins at his Olaf's, Kansas, home every year and invites well-wishers to tour Paula's Penguin Playground for charity.) Afterward, fold it, place in a trash bag and lay flat.



JINGLE BELLS: See O, Ornaments.

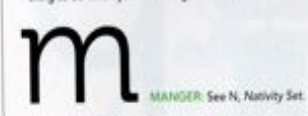


KRINGLE, KRIS: See I, Inflatable Santa.



LIGHTS: Wrap each string around a separate paper towel roll, placing the plug ends inside the rolls, suggests Mellen. Spare bulbs and parts can go in sandwich bags stored in the same box as the lights.

LINENS: Hang tablecloths, quilts, napkins and placemats from pants hangers in a closet, says Leist. If you press them now before next season, you'll have one fewer thing to do when you're setting the table.



MANGER: See N, Nativity Set.

NATIVITY SET: Keep all of the pieces together in one box, with tiny pieces stored in sandwich bags and the entire set cushioned in bubble wrap, says Mellen.



ORNAMENTS, GLASS, CRYSTAL OR CERAMIC: "Create a lasagna of decorations in a tub or box," says Mellen. Line the bottom of the box with plush stockings and your tree skirt, then wrap ornaments in tissue paper or wrapping paper and nest them on top of the fabrics. Cover with several sheets of tissue paper. Just like with a lasagna, layer tissue paper and ornaments until you reach the top of the box. No tissue paper? Substitute Easter grass, bubble wrap, Styrofoam peanuts or old fabric. Slip ornament hangers in plastic sandwich bags and nestle them in the box. Another option: Rest ornaments in the bottom of egg cartons or stacked in divided wine boxes from the liquor store.

ORNAMENTS, DOUGH: If you can't bear to part with them, cover them with plastic wrap and freeze them.



RIBBON: Leist suggests laying spoons in a row in a clear plastic shoe bin (\$3.79; containerstore.com). Or you can stack them on an old paper towel holder, either the upright kind or one that can be mounted on a wall in a garage or spare room, suggests Mellen.



STOCKINGS: See O, Ornaments.



POINSETTIA, ARTIFICIAL: Blow off the dust with a hair dryer set on low heat or vacuum it with a brush attachment and wrap it in a trash bag, says Mellen. Stand it in a box filled with Styrofoam peanuts.



QUILT: See L, Linens.



TAGS, GIFT: "File them inside sheet protectors in a three-ring binder," says Doland. Then, you can also store greeting cards, tissue paper and wrapping paper remnants.

TREE, ARTIFICIAL: Strip the tree of its ornaments and lights, dismantle it and wrap it up in a couple of contractor bags, which are stronger and larger than typical garbage bags, suggests Mellen. (Find them at hardware stores.) Rest it gently in a corner of your storage area so that the branches won't flatten out.

TREE STAND: Wash it with hot soapy water to remove tree sap that could attract insects, suggests Mellen, and dry it well. If it's metal, hang it on a nail in a garage or basement to prevent rust.



UGLY ORNAMENT FROM AUNT SARA: See O, Ornaments.



VILLAGE, CHRISTMAS: See N, Nativity Set.



WREATH, ARTIFICIAL: Wrap it in a clear garbage bag to repel dust, says Leist. Hang on a hook in your garage or basement, or lay flat.

WRAPPING PAPER: Stand the rolls in a tall trash bin to protect them from getting smashed, suggests Leist. Or store in an underbed bin (try the Rubbermaid Under Bed Box, \$16.97; lowes.com). Another option: Hang them in a clear garment bag in a closet.



XMAS TREE STAND: See T, Tree Stand.



YARD ART: See I, Inflatable Reindeer/Santa/Snowman.



ZANY HOLIDAY ITEMS: Dancing plush Santas, reindeer antlers and other fun stuff can be boxed up with ornaments. See O.



Reporting by Clara Hansberg and Peter Walsh