

How to protect your fine wools against damage by moth larvae



Year after year you follow the same ritual: as the weather transitions from summer to fall, you dig out your wool sweaters, slacks/trousers, blazers/sport coats, suits, coats and scarves and carefully examine them for any evidence of “moth damage”.

And all the while you’re thinking: here we go again. That vicious cycle of storage, reweaving and wearing, storage, reweaving and wearing.

Understanding the problem

So what can you do to break the cycle?

As with most issues, **before you can formulate a solution, you need to first understand the problem.**

Here’s what you need to know.....

The female adult moth can lay up to 200 eggs in a cycle, up to 5 cycles a year. When the female adult moth is searching for the “ideal” egg laying location, **she’s looking for a source of nutrition for the larvae to feed on when they hatch.**

Those larvae must feed in order to survive and grow. Otherwise they die.

Unfortunately, garments stored **without first being cleaned** contain all the nutrients necessary to sustain life for those larvae. These nutrients include proteins, mineral salts, vitamin B complex and cholesterol that accumulate on your garments from perspiration, body oil, food or beverage **simply by virtue of the fact that the garment has been worn.**

The problem is complicated by the fact that the larvae will often feast on the inside of a garment, on the surface of a garment, or on certain threads

in a garment. This reduces the thickness or strength of the fibers in those places. So when the garment is next worn, hand washed or dry cleaned, the possibility exists that holes that were not previously visible to the naked eye could open up.

Here’s the key: Contrary to conventional wisdom, the larvae don’t “eat your wools because they love wool.”

Irrespective of the type of wool – angora, cashmere, camelhair, lambswool, merino, mohair, vicuna, etc. – **the wool itself, is not a food source for the larvae.**

Instead, **the larvae feast on what’s embedded in and on the wool**, and, in the process, damage those wool fibers.

Accordingly, the term “moth damage” is technically inaccurate; “moth larvae damage” is a more accurate term.

Examining your wools

You now know what causes “moth damage”.

The next step is to carefully examine your wools to determine if your garments have, indeed, been affected by moth damage.

You need to look at two areas:

- Where the fabric has **been eaten completely through** (the fabric will show a hole with the

fibers around the edge of the hole partially eaten away). This problem is more typically found on thinner wool sweaters.

- Where the fabric has **been eaten on the surface** (the fabric will appear to be “cratered” with the cloth partially eaten away). This problem is more typically found on thicker wool coats, sport coats and blazers.

Lighter colors are easier to detect; darker colors more difficult to detect. But, with careful examination, such as holding up the garment to the light, you should be able to see moth damage with the naked eye.

Formulating the solution

Now that you know what the problem is, the solution is really quite simple:

The only way to guarantee that you won’t have a “moth problem” is to remove the nutrition from your fine wools before you store your wool garments for the season.

And the only way to remove those nutrients is by hand washing and/or dry cleaning your fine wools before you store.

Even if you think your items are clean, you ought to clean them anyway.

Why?

Because there are many different kinds of stains that you may not have seen and that will leave a layer of organic material for the moth larvae to feed on.

Remember the mantra: **clean before you store because clean means no nutrition. And no nutrition means no more “moth damage”.**

Notice that we’ve said nothing about cedar blocks, cedar chests, cedar lined closets, herbal sachets, moth balls, non-polypropylene plastic boxes, cardboard boxes, zip lock bags, nylon zip up bags, and vinyl zip up bags.

Why? Because these solutions don’t **eliminate** the problem, they only **contain** the problem. And containment may not solve the problem anyway.

A simple 3 step protection system

That having been said, you can enhance the protection of your fine wools while in storage in 3 ways:

- Clean all your wool garments before you store them for the season,
- Store your washed and/or dry cleaned wools in breathable, polypropylene storage bags or in breathable, cotton storage bags.
- Keep your closets clean. Vacuum regularly.

Please note: Keeping your closets clean and vacuuming regularly will not, in and of themselves, protect against “moth damage”. It can help.

The only real protection against “moth damage” is clean garments.



Stu Bloom

Founder and President of RAVE FabriCARE

RAVE FabriCARE, based in Scottsdale, Arizona, cares for fine garments, household textiles and accessories and serves clients in the USA and Canada and in other selected countries throughout the world. Stu is the author of various Position Papers, White Papers and Ebooks on these subjects, all of which are available from [ravefabricare/downloads/free-stuff](https://ravefabricare.com/downloads/free-stuff). He is an evangelist for true quality cleaning and is a contributor to and editor of True Quality Cleaning, RAVE FabriCARE's blog.



Looking for more great resources?

Check out our Resource Library for over 60 expert Position Papers (short discussions), White Papers (longer in-depth discussions) and Ebooks spanning all aspects of caring for your fine garments, household textiles and accessories.