

Storage Solutions

When deciding how to best preserve their coins, collectors have a variety of options to consider.

EVERY COIN has a story, from the privileged background of a proof specimen to the rough-and-tumble journey of a circulating piece. The drama continues even in your collection, as coins are constantly under assault by harmful outside forces threatening to dull their brilliance or mar their surfaces. Fortunately, with wise storage choices, you can play the hero and protect your coins from potential dangers.

Contact is a coin's original nemesis. Clashes with other coins cause scratches and marks, and handling gradually wears away design details. But there is another serious concern—the atmosphere. The air we breathe is a persistent threat, as sinister elements cause harmful chemical reactions on coin surfaces. Oxygen turns copper coins from orange-red to brown, and sulfur discolors silver pieces. Humidity acts as an accomplice, accelerating and exacerbating these problems.

Effective coin storage begins with a location that minimizes humidity (desiccants or a dehumidifier can help), maintains a stable and cool temperature, and protects from household hazards like flooding. It's also vital to house coins in holders, isolating them from harm while keeping them accessible and visible.

Fortunately, there are many good options for storing individual coins: 2 x 2s are the most commonly used holders. A coin is placed behind thin mylar windows attached to cardboard, which is then folded and stapled into a 2-inch-square package. 2 x 2s have windows of various sizes, and infor-

mation can be written on the holder. They're inexpensive, costing only a few cents apiece.

However, there are some caveats with 2 x 2s. Though they hold coins securely, their seals aren't perfectly airtight. Dust or other contaminants must be removed before a coin is inserted. Most perilously, staples can cause



▲ Safe storage practices ensure your collection's future.

scratches, either through the thin windows of adjacent holders or as coins are removed. It's a good idea to flatten staples flush with the cardboard. As long as they are used carefully, 2 x 2s are a good choice for most coins.

"Flips" are the same size as 2 x 2s, but generally cost more. They are entirely transparent, holding a coin in one pouch, with room for written information in another. The biggest potential drawback is that soft flips made with PVC (polyvinyl chloride) contain chemicals that attack and ruin coin surfaces. These definitely should be avoided. Safer versions of inert mylar can be brittle. In addition, flips are nowhere near airtight, so coins are somewhat unprotected from the atmosphere.

Overall, flips can be a reasonable choice if they are PVC-free and housed in a supplemental airtight container.

Hard-plastic holders are inert and safe, with openings for coins of standard sizes. They provide strong protection with little risk. Some are 2 inches square, while others are capsules that fit into larger holders. Hard-plastic containers tend to have very tight seals, and some even have corrosion deterrents inside. They are relatively bulky, and, at around a dollar each, they might be reserved for particularly important coins.

There also are two approaches to storing assortments of coins: Boxes house dozens of holders and provide additional protection from the atmosphere. Hard-plastic boxes, or cardboard boxes with anti-corrosive material inside, are especially good choices. Food-safe plastic containers also can house coins in holders.

Albums dispense with holders altogether, instead housing collections of coins. Folders offer minimal protection and really are suitable only for inexpensive, circulated coins. Sturdier albums have sliding windows, but be careful the windows don't scratch the coins. And as usual, anything directly touching a coin should be free of harmful materials—sulfur in cardboard is a particular concern. Another alternative is to arrange individual holders in PVC-free pages in a three-ring binder.

As you acquire coins, you should immediately replace any questionable holders with ones you know are appropriate and safe. With just a bit of thought, effort and expenditure, today's storage choices will ensure that your coins remain preserved and protected for the future.

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