

Disaster Relief

Salvaging Household Furniture



Before starting to salvage damaged furniture, decide which pieces are worth restoring. Make your decision according to these factors:

- Extent of damage
- Cost of the article
- Sentimental value
- Cost of restoration

Consider each piece individually. Antiques may be worth the time, effort, and expense of restoration. Generally, except for drying and cleaning, the less that is done to an antique, the better, since even minor changes can reduce its value.

Try to preserve the original finish of antiques. Restoration is preferable to refinishing. Antiques should dry out very slowly to reduce uneven shrinkage, which can result in cracking, warping, and splitting. Unless you are an experienced furniture restorer, it is best to leave restoration to a professional who can preserve the value of the piece. Improper drying, restoration, and repair can cause more damage.

Solid wood furniture can usually be restored, unless the piece was in water for several days and the damage is severe. Clean and dry the piece, then assess whether or not it can be repaired. Wood expands when it is water-soaked and shrinks when it dries. This may loosen joints and cause swelling and warping. Slightly warped boards may be removed and straightened or replaced. Woodworking tools, clamps, and other equipment or materials may be needed. Decide if you have the time, equipment, and ability to do the work.

Veneered furniture may not be worth the cost and effort of repair unless it is very valuable to you. Veneered furniture usually has a core material that is plywood, particleboard, or medium-density fiberboard. Particleboard and fiber cores swell when they come in contact with water. Therefore, veneered seams will come apart after being saturated.

Printed vinyl surfaces and low-pressure laminates will come unglued and cannot be repaired, even by a professional. If veneer is loose in only a few places, you

may be able to repair it, but veneered furniture repairs are usually best done by a professional.

If insurance does not replace flood-damaged furniture, it may be best to apply your money to new furniture, rather than paying for extensive repair.

Salvaging Flooded Furniture

Upholstered furniture and mattresses contaminated by floodwater should be discarded. If an upholstered piece is valuable and if the piece seems worth the effort, you need to clean and oil the springs and replace the stuffing and upholstery. Solid wood, metal, and plastic furniture may be cleaned and restored. Hose off any mud, clean, sanitize, and let dry out of direct sunlight.

Mildew

Mildew may have developed on damp or wet upholstered furniture. Mildew is a gray-white mold that stains and rots fabric unless you remove it promptly.

Here's how to remove mildew or mildew spots:

- Brush with a soft-bristled broom to remove loose mold from outer covering. Do this outdoors, to prevent scattering mold spores in the house. If the article is moist or damp, dry by using an electric fan/heater. If possible, place the article in direct sunlight and air to stop mold growth.
- Vacuum the surface to draw out mold. Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag outside to avoid scattering mold spores in the house.
- If mildew remains and fabric is washable, sponge lightly with thick soap or detergent suds. Wipe with a clean, damp cloth. Get as little water on the fabric as possible so the padding doesn't get wet.
- If mold remains, wipe the furniture with a damp cloth dipped in diluted alcohol (1 cup rubbing alcohol to 1 cup water) or a chlorine bleach solution (¼ teaspoon bleach to a cup of water). Test in an area that is hidden.
- Dry the article thoroughly.
- Use a low-pressure spray containing a fungicide to get rid of musty odors and remaining mildew.

Moisten all surfaces thoroughly. Respray frequently if mildew is still a problem. Spraying rooms with an aerosol material does not eliminate mildew problems.

- If molds have grown into an inner part of furniture, send furniture to a dry cleaning or storage company for thorough drying and fumigation. Fumigation kills molds present at the time but will not protect against future attacks.

Salvaging Flooded Wooden Furniture

If wooden furniture is salvageable, slow drying and proper repair are essential. Rubber gloves should be used with cleaning solutions or when working with flood-damaged or moldy furniture.

Submerged Furniture

- Take furniture outdoors and remove back panels, drawers, doors, and as many removable parts as possible. Drawers and doors will probably stick due to expanding, wet wood. Do not try to force them out from the front.
- Use a hose to clean off mud and dirt inside and out.
- Take the furniture to a well-ventilated storage area. Do not let it dry in the sun, or it will warp and twist out of shape. Allow it to dry slowly.
- Check the furniture periodically. Remove drawers and open doors as soon as you can without forcing them. Continue to leave the back panel off to allow air to circulate throughout the piece. It may take several weeks or months before the furniture is completely dry and ready to repair and refinish.

- Mildew will continue to grow as long as the wood has a moisture content above 20 percent. Use wood-cleaning products that contain mineral spirits on mildewed surfaces. Be sure to check underneath and inside.
- Solid wood furniture with a cloudy finish, flaking or missing finish, open joints, and even cracks and warped boards can be salvaged. The joints can be reglued and warped boards can be straightened. Consult an experienced cabinetmaker. Special tools will be needed. If you do not have the skills or the tools, get an estimate. Compare that with the cost of buying new furniture of comparable quality.

Damp Furniture

White spots or a cloudy film may develop on damp furniture that has not been under water. To remove white spots:

1. If the entire surface is affected, rub with a damp cloth dipped in turpentine or in a solution of ½ cup household ammonia and ½ cup water. Wipe dry at once, and, if the color is restored, polish with wax or furniture polish.
2. If color is not restored, dip 000 steel wool in oil (boiled linseed, olive, mineral, or lemon). Rub lightly with the wood grain. Wipe with a soft cloth and re wax.
3. For deep spots, use a drop or two of ammonia on a damp cloth. Rub at once with a dry cloth. Polish. Rubbing cigarette ashes, powdered pumice, or a piece of walnut into spots may help remove them.
4. If spots remain after all efforts to remove them, the piece should be stripped of the old finish and refinished.

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