

## **“Conserve with Worn Vintage Linens - One Last Use”**

### **Upcycling and Re-purposing**

*Listed below are great uses for vintage linens that are thin, have holes or stains or, for some other reason may not be good for their original purpose. Crafting is always an option, but the ideas below are fast, will save you time and money, and are ecologically sound.*

- Dish Protectors - Lay doilies, hot pads, or embroidered mats between stored dishes to protect from scratches. Women used to crochet “doilies” just for that purpose. Also, pillowcases make good storage covers for serving platters or painted trays to prevent scratching.
- Dust covers - Use pillowcases (whole or cut in half) or guest towels, to cover handbags, shoes, guitars, artwork, blankets, etc. Cut a small “X” in the center of the towel or remove the stitches in about 1” of the bottom seam of a pillowcase to slip over the hanger and cover clothes in the closet. These also make great bags/wraps to protect tablecloths and napkins and pieces of silver tableware.
- Produce Bags - Pillowcases can also be made into shopping bags for produce and bulk items. Close them with a strip of torn fabric or a shoelace. Women used to make special embroidered and labeled bags for these purposes.
- Shelf and drawer liners - Use guest towels and pillowcases folded or cut to fit. Embroidered tablecloths, especially with crocheted edges, work well to cut in pieces to line a shelf. Let the pretty edge hang over the front. This also protects linens from acids in the wood or paint on the shelves.
- Refrigerator drawer liners - Use kitchen towels to line refrigerator drawers just as you would paper towels, old napkins work also.
- Aprons - Use square tablecloths folded on the diagonal as an apron. Two corners tie around your waist and the top corner can be folded under at the waist or left chest high and be pinned to your shirt. Old aprons were often pinned, thus the word “pin-a-fore”.
- Food covers - Use faded and stained tablecloths to cover a buffet table of food before serving. Cloths actually were made for that purpose. They were large enough to cover the table but not hang over the sides like a true tablecloth would do. They were called “tablelets”. When serving the harvest crew or a large family outside, this was very practical.
- Place Mats - Worn towels also make great individual placemats, especially nice if you take your lunch someplace. Much more sanitary than a desk or table in a public area.
- Pitcher covers - Doilies were often lined with netting or a handkerchief and draped over lemonade or iced tea pitchers to keep bugs out. Sometimes they were waited

with buttons or shells to keep a breeze from blowing them away. Any food dish can be covered with a clean cloth.

- Tea or coffee pot warmers - Drape a worn towel around a tea or coffee pot and tie through the handle to keep your afternoon break beverage warm for a while longer.
- Carrying bags - Large squares of any cloth can be used to wrap items to be carried. Tie corner to corner over the top to form the handle. In Japan they have special cloths for this.
- First Aid - Cotton and linen absorb all liquid quickly. A stack of clean fabric can be kept in or by a first aid kit. Cutting in smaller pieces, about 10" square works well.
- Mug Mats and Coasters - The old crochet potholders are too small for hands and most pots these days. But they make great mug mats. And they are fun and colorful. Tiny crochet doilies may have been meant to be coasters (they could as easily have been an unfinished tablecloth) but they make great coasters. Wash with like colors and stretch to shape. Dry flat.
- Gift Wrap - Set the item in the center and pull the corners up. Tie with a bow. Use those small doilies on the tops of preserves for gifts. Secure in place with a rubber band and cover with pretty ribbon or raffia.
- Use those old hankies! Wash as usual, dry flat, on a warm surface if you have one. Better for your nose too, no paper fibers to irritate. These also work as bits of color under vases or tucked into a table arrangement.
- To re-use linens, some folks get "fancy" and finish edges, make nice hems, etc. but it all works if you just cut them up to fit the purpose. After washing them a couple times the edges will just naturally "self-fringe". ☺

Adopt the attitude that these linens were meant to be used. Unless they are delicate, they are not hard to launder. Your everyday system will be fine. Each of us needs to decide what is "good enough" in terms of ironing. Old cotton and linen are actually pretty nice when hung to dry. Or smoothed, maybe folded and dried flat. This can happen fast on a sunny day on your picnic table. Cover lightly with worn cloths if you are concerned about fading. Hanging fabrics out to dry and/or ironing them is very soothing for some people. It can be a very meditative activity.

Old cotton and linen pillowcases are the best thing ever to encourage a good nights sleep. Yes, these are often beautifully embellished. The women who did this work were not texting or browsing the internet. They had other things to do with their hands. They crafted these items to be enjoyed and used.

Every house needs at least one linen towel to polish glassware. Just a quick dry out of the dishwasher does wonders. Great shine and no lint. You can do it on the way to putting them in the cupboard.

If you decide to iron, do it all at once. Let items dry and wait till you get a stack. Put them in a large bag, about the size of a pillowcase. Or just use a pillowcase. No need to sprinkle or mist/spray as our Grandmothers did. Just throw in a cup or so of water and let it sit overnight. The fabric should be just damp when you are ready to iron. It may take a couple times till you figure out how much water you need for your system. Large plastic “dampening” bags with zippers were used in the 50s and 60s. If you have big plastic bags from shopping or those vacuum storage bags this is a great re-purpose.