

Care and Feeding of Holiday Costumes

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General Protocols for Garment Care

During the performing season it is a good idea to keep a spray bottle on hand with Santa True's recipe of cheap vodka with a drop or two of vanilla and peppermint on hand to spray garments between uses. This helps to keep garments smelling fresh and reduces the number of cleanings required which can weaken fabrics.

At the end of the season be sure to take all pieces out of garment bags and check over each piece for damage, stains, missing embellishments, etc. Any needed repairs should be taken to a reliable seamstress or costumer. This will assure quality replacements of any embellishment and flawless repairs. For those items that need to be cleaned, be sure to find reliable cleaners, preferably one who specializes in wedding attire. Two used by Disneyland Resort in Southern CA are Sax (2300 SE Bristol St., Ste. Newport Beach) and L& N Costume and Linen Service (1602 E. Edinger Ave. Santa Ana). The importance of using a quality cleaning establishment is to not have issues with colors running into fur, shrinking of velvets and burning of furs and delicate fabrics from cleaning solutions.

The best way to be sure not to have damaged fur is to have suits made with removable fur. I make mine that way, using snap tape. One disadvantage of this is the fur can be pulled off on stage with enough force. The same can be true for Velcro attachment which, with fur, is generally a bad idea since the hook side will eventually get clogged with fur fibers and stop being functional. Fur can often be hand or machine washed on a gentle cycle and air dried. Afterwards gently brush fur to restore the nap and luster. Fur can also be spot cleaned with a soft rag and baby shampoo or cleaning wipes.

Any cotton garments can be machine washed and gently dried. Most Mrs. Claus and Elf costumes are made of cottons and stretch velvets which can also be gently machine-washed and dried. Mrs. Claus aprons can also be treated with Bluing to make them appear brighter. Use bleach with care as over time it can weaken the fabric.

Any leather or vinyl items should be properly treated, wrapped and stored in soft bags. Check faux leathers for damage and breakdown as these fabrics can damage other garment if they touch.

Garments should be loosely stored in a cool dry environment after cleaning so they are ready for the next season. Also be sure to check everything over at the beginning of the season.

Care and Feeding of Holiday Costumes

Velvet

Most Santa suits and more formal Mrs. Claus dresses are made of velvet. Though more elegant looking most will not be colorfast, so hand washing can be problematic and with cleaning have a tendency to bleed into white fur.

There are generally three type of velvet used in suits: Rayon, cotton, and polyester blends which include stretch velvet. Occasionally silk velvet might be used. While noteworthy, silk is not practical unless only for theatrical performances and may be difficult to find.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Rayon Velvet	Light-weight Breathes More rich look Readily available	Not very durable Crushes easily
Cotton Velvet	Very durable Machine washable	Tends to be a little heavier Harder to find
Stretch Velvet	Durable Machine washable	Can be heavy Tends to not keep a shape Not as elegant as regular velvet

Fur

There are several types of fur both real hide and faux. Alpaca is the primary source, from hides or rugs, and there are many faux furs that are quite elegant and can vary quite a bit in price. White velvet is also an option, but can be quite difficult to keep clean.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Real Fur	Very lush More resistant to dirt Durable	Animal activists Can be very heavy Pricey May be hard to obtain
Faux Fur	Cheaper Readily available Many different types	Can be harder to keep looking good Can be less durable

Linings

Garments are generally lined with satin, cotton, or polyester linings. Mesh fabrics can also be used in ultra-hot climates. Since I currently live in a warm climate, I make my Santa suits with cotton lining, and hats with a breathable mesh lining. It is not as elegant as satin, but satin doesn't breathe and it stains from perspiration.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Satin	More dressy Range of prices Durable Readily available	Easily stained Can be heavy Doesn't breathe

Care and Feeding of Holiday Costumes

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Cotton	Light weight Cheap Durable Breathes Machine washable	Less dressy Shrinks with washing if not pre-shrunk
Lining fabrics	Light weight Cheap Durable Machine washable	Doesn't breathe
Mesh	Light weight Cheap Durable Breathes Machine washable	Less dressy May be hard to find

Vests

Generally, depending on the occasion, brocade is the fabric of choice for Santa vests. It is available in a variety of prints and should be dry-cleaned. Cotton can also be used for more informal vests. Make sure your seamstress pre-washes cotton fabrics before construction to avoid shrinkage.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Brocade	More dressy Range of prices Durable Readily available	Easily stained and snagged Can be heavy Doesn't breathe Dry-clean only
Cotton	Light weight Cheap Durable Breathes Machine washable	Less dressy Shrinks with washing if not pre-shrunk