

Cruising Sail Care & Maintenance

In Use...

- Keep sails out of the sun when not in use by using sail bags, main cover and leech cover on roller furling sails. Sailcloth will typically lose half of its strength with three months continuous exposure.
- Look out for exposed cotter pins in the rigging or other sharp edges to tear the sail. Tape up where necessary.
- On tacking, release the genoa sheet no later than when the boat is head-to-wind. Backing the genoa against the spreader can distort or damage the sail.
- When leaving the boat, ease the halyard on a roller furling headsail to prevent permanent luff stretching. Similarly, ease the main outhaul if the foot is not a loose foot or shelf design.
- Avoid letting sails flog. This damages the cloth and reduces sail performance. Adjust the genoa fairlead and the leech cord to stop leech flutter. Do not motor directly upwind with the mainsail hoisted and flogging.
- Light sails should not be used for beating upwind in winds beyond the sailmaker's recommended maximum.
- Sails, especially laminates, should be folded rather than stuffed to avoid unnecessary creasing which breaks down the material.
- Dry sails before stowing them to avoid mildew. Nylon spinnakers and gennakers can bleed color between panels if stored wet.
- Storage on board should be in a dry, ventilated space away from hot items such as the engine, heater or cabin lights. Laminated sails can be ruined by soaking in petroleum products, such as diesel or gasoline. If they become exposed, clean gently with detergent and water. Allow them to dry, and keep your fingers crossed that you caught it before the adhesive was weakened.
- Excess heat can distort or weaken sails. Do not keep them in a closed car trunk or other closed container, which can build up heat in the sun.



detergent and a brush, but do not use excessive agitation. Dry before folding for storage. Oil stains can be treated with a number of industrial solvents and even some household spray cleaners. For laminate sails, however, do not use any cleaner more powerful than household detergents as they can breakdown the adhesive in the laminate.

- In very damp climates, spraying Lysol into the sail bag before closing will help reduce the chance of mildew.
- Mildew should be killed as soon as it appears to stop it from spreading. Small areas can be sprayed with Lysol spray. Larger areas can be washed with a 25% Solution of Clorox Bleach and water (NOTE: Kevlar or Nylon Sails should NEVER be exposed to Clorox!!!) Soak for 15 minutes and then rinse thoroughly with a hose. Stains will fade slowly with sunlight exposure once the mildew is dead. Storing sails dry in a well-ventilated area reduces the chance for mildew. Wet roller furling sails should be rolled up loosely to allow them to dry.

Maintenance

- Small tears in lightly loaded areas (not near the leech) can be temporarily patched with sail repair tape or even duct tape to stop the tear from enlarging.
- A few broken stitches probably won't cause a failure unless they are near the leech. If they are there, have the sail re-stitched before the seam lets go completely and makes the repair more difficult.
- Take your sails in for an annual inspection and maintenance. If this is not practical, spread them out and look for wear, broken stitches and rips.

Storage

- Store sails for the off-season in a warm, dry space away from hot times like furnaces, hot water pipes and electric heater.
- Sails should be folded rather than stuffed to avoid unnecessary creasing which breaks down the material.

Cleaning

- Annual cleaning to remove dirt and salt before winter storage is good. Use a mild laundry

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*Don't have the space or the time? Storage, cleaning, annual inspections and repairs are all available here.

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