

FLOATING OR WASHING STAMPS

WHAT STAMPS TO FLOAT?

The first step is to determine whether to save the stamp as it is on the envelope (also known to stamp collectors as “covers”). This decision will be one of personal choice. If you are not sure about removing a stamp, ask an experienced collector for advice.

Sometimes you would like to keep the stamp on a “piece” of the envelope as the cancellation mark is of greater interest than the stamp itself.

SORTING STAMPS FOR FLOATING

Discard all torn or heavily canceled stamps. Torn or damaged stamps are worth nothing and the only time one would keep such an item is if it is the only example you have and you want to keep it as a “space” filler until a better example is obtained.

Sort the stamps into piles based on the colours of the backing paper. For example all stamps on red paper in one pile. The reason is that certain papers can and will stain the water that will be used for floating/soaking and this in turn can cause the stamps to get stained. Always float like papers together, white with white, brown with brown etc.

Red is a particular problem colour and stamps on red paper should be floated one at a time and removed from the water as soon as possible. Change the water often.

METHODS OF WASHING OR FLOATING STAMPS

This area has many different opinions and methods and you will need to try them all to see what method you prefer.

Warning, not all stamps can be floated or immersed into water, as the inks (mainly older and classic stamps) used can be damaged. Other methods are available for these stamps and will be discussed.

Firstly, we need some equipment to float stamps. The list below lists some of the items that are used.

- Tray or dish – any container will do
- Newspaper, blotting paper or paper toweling
- Salt
- Dish wash liquid
- Sweatbox
- Drying book

Method 1

Place lukewarm water into a dish. Place stamps face up and “float” on top of the water. This will allow the backing paper to separate and drop to the bottom of the dish leaving the stamp floating. Remove stamp with hands and place and rinse in fresh water until all glue residue is gone.

Method 2

Place lukewarm water into a dish. Add a pinch of salt (this helps loosen the gum). Place stamps onto water and once they are floating loose remove them and rinse them in fresh water.

Method 3

(This is my preferred method)

Place stamp in hot water with a pinch of salt and a small splash of dish wash. (Dish wash is a wetting agent and in addition to this gives the stamps a good clean). Stamps should start to come free from the backing paper in a very short space of time. Remove stamps and rinse in fresh water at least twice to remove any residue of the glue and dish wash. This method also works well with the new self adhesive or peel and stick type stamps. – *figure- 1*

Method 4

Microwave – place stamps with a pinch of salt into a small dish with a small amount of water. “Cook” on high for a minute or so. Stamps will now be floating loose. Add cold water to dish and remove stamps. Rinse with fresh water. This method works well with self adhesive stamps. However many of the glues used are extremely difficult to remove and in many cases stamps should be rather collected on piece.

DO NOT USE THIS METHOD WITH OLDER STAMPS UNLESS YOU HAVE TESTED THIS METHOD ON SIMILAR STAMPS.

Method 5 – Sweat box

This method is used on stamps that you do not want to immerse in water. This is the preferred method for older stamps that may have “fugitive” inks and stamps with chalk surfaced paper (these stamps have ink that will run if immersed in water). Stamps are placed in the sweatbox that has a small amount of moisture added. This creates a type of greenhouse and although the stamps dampen they are not totally immersed in water. Old hinges, backing paper and residue are then easily removed from the stamp.

These boxes are easy to make. Take a small plastic box such as a sweet box etc. Place a cut to shape piece of hard foam rubber in the bottom. Cover this with a piece of flexible plastic with holes punched in. To use wet the foam rubber lightly. Place stamps face up on the plastic spacer and close lid. After a few hours you will be able to remove any backing or residue on the stamps. *Figure-2*



figure1



figure2



figure3



figure4

STAMPS

DRYING OF STAMPS

This is another area with many opinions and preferences.

You can place your floated or washed stamps face down on paper toweling, blotting paper or newspaper. Stamps are always placed face down so that if there is any glue residue remaining the stamp will not stick to the paper.
Never use coloured paper.

You can either leave the stamps to dry like this or you can press the stamps in between two sheets of blotting paper. Another popular and preferred method is to use a stamp drying book which is designed to dry stamps. *Figure-3*

If you leave the stamps to dry on paper, you will notice that some stamps will curl. Once stamps are dry you can then press them flat by placing them into books and leaving them for a week or so which will leave them nice and flat.

If you use a drying book, you take the stamps that are damp to the touch (not wet) and place in the book. Then place a large heavy book like a telephone directory on top and leave for a week or so.

If using blotting paper, follow the same instructions as if you were using a drying book. *Figure-4*

OTHER INFORMATION

- Never float stamps with a red paper backing with any other stamps. In addition to this when you have to float these stamps, remove them as soon as possible in order to stop any staining. This rule also applies to some blue papers.
- If you have a “toned” or “foxed” stamp (stamps with brown spots). You may find that a quick wash using method 3 will clean and in some cases remove the spotting.
- Never pull stamps away from the backing paper while floating, as wet paper is weak and can tear, rather wait for the stamps to come loose on their own.
- Irrespective of what method you use, always make sure the glue is off the back of the stamp. This can be done by giving the back of the stamp a rub while in the water. You will soon be able to tell which stamps have a glue remainder on them as they have a “slimy” feel.
- Never use the microwave method without adult supervision.
- Always use your fingers when working with wet stamps and never stamp tweezers or tongs as these could damage the stamp. Once stamps are dry and pressed the reverse applies – you should only use the tweezers or tongs.
- If you wish to float a large block off use a small plate rather than a dish as it makes the block easier to handle and can stop the block breaking apart.

STAMPS