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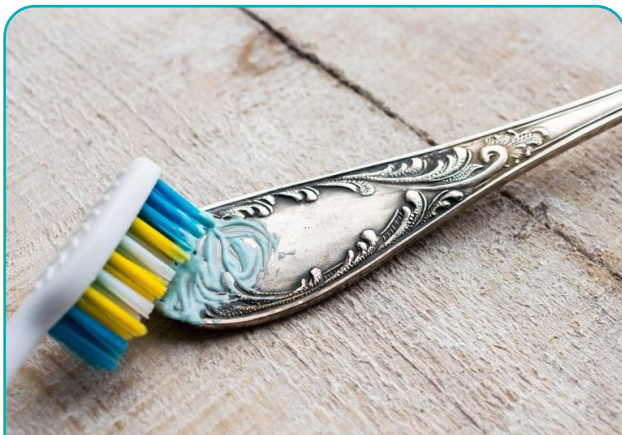
Jenny Knott
Silver & Jewellery Specialist

CARING FOR SILVER

Six simple rules to keep your silver in top condition

Rule one

Caring for your silver starts with understanding a little about the properties of silver. Sterling silver is 92.5% silver and therefore only 7.5% alloy. Compare this with 9 carat gold which is 37.5% gold and 72.5% alloy, or even 18 carat gold which is 75% gold. Silver, therefore, which is not an inherently hard metal, is extremely vulnerable to scratching. According to the Mohs scale which measures the hardness of materials; in order of softness, you have sterling silver, 9 carat gold, 18 carat gold, platinum and palladium. **Rule number one** is therefore to avoid cleaning with anything even slightly abrasive. I prefer pastes and foams which you apply with warm water.



For cleaning tricky or intricate places, use a soft toothbrush with light, circular movements

Rule two

Given that silver is a soft metal, you also need to be careful not to bend it or make it vulnerable to dents. For example, it is common to see legs of sauce boats pushed in. Splits can also occur around the edges of pieces so **rule number two** is to always handle your silver ware with care, remembering that the lighter and thinner it is the more vulnerable it will be to damage.

Rule three

Can you put silver in the dishwasher? I would say that the answer is yes. However, **rule number three** - do not load silver and stainless steel in the same compartment or where they might touch. This will lead to oxidation and oxidation is what causes silver to tarnish or blacken. For those who think I am a philistine to suggest that it is acceptable to wash silver in the dish washer I would say this - the method of dish washing is no more likely to damage the silver than washing by hand. Drying silver is as likely, if not more so, to remove some of the silver and cause rubbing. If you've ever noticed that hallmarks have become obscure and difficult to read this is because polishing or cleaning has worn down the surface.



A scratched silver tray requiring professional polishing

Whilst we are on the subject of dish washers, if you have bone handled knives, do not put them in the dishwasher. They will dry out, crack and the pitch that holds the blades in place may seep out. Knives should always be washed by hand.

Rule four

Oxidisation is the principal cause of tarnishing, so **rule number four** is to adhere to following suggestions to minimise the chances of your

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silver tarnishing. The less you have to polish it, the less likely that you will be rubbing away the silver itself. The first suggestion is use your silver. Most silverware will be cleaned after using and frequent light cleaning will be much kinder on your silver than trying to remove heavy tarnish.



Before and after due to tarnish

If you do need to store your silver, store in a dry place away from high temperatures. Both heat and humidity accelerate the rate at which silver tarnishes. If you are storing flatware, use special tarnish reducing storage bags or for bulkier items, acid free tissue paper. Do not use newspaper as the ink is acidic and can cause damage. The same goes for rubber bands. Tempting though it may be to bundle items together, rubber bands contain sulphur which causes rapid and destructive tarnishing.

Do not store silver in plastic bags as they can retain moisture. Finally, you now have a use for those little silica gel sachets which seem to come with so many purchases – pop these in with your silver and they will help absorb moisture. Incidentally oils, onions, eggs, salad dressings all contain ingredients which will accelerate the speed of tarnishing, so if you do use silver with these products wash them quickly afterwards and dry them. You may have noticed that egg spoons often have gilded bowls, this is because gold does not tarnish in the same way and it is there to protect the silver.

Rule five

You may also have observed that silver salts usually have glass liners or are gilded. Salt corrodes silver. This is different from tarnish which can be fairly easily pushed off. Badly corroded silver might need to be taken to a professional to clean or replate. Therefore, **rule number five** clean your silver after use and do not leave salt sitting in your salt container. Salty snacks like peanuts and crisps will have the same effect. Even if the gilded of liner protects the base, it will often not protect the borders. And take the salt spoons out of the salts.



This is corrosion and this cannot be polished but would need to be replated

Rule six

Rule number six, use and enjoy your silver. Use impregnated soft cloths, foams and basic mild detergent and warm water to keep your silver sparkling; and finally, know that notwithstanding your best efforts silver will always tarnish, so employ the simple rules to keep this to a minimum.