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Save time when stashing the Santa

By [Sara Busse](#)



*Chip Ellis*

Original packing boxes for artificial greenery line the hall in the Governor's Mansion, ready for repacking.

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- When it's time to pack up holiday décor, there's no need to crush the crèche or to trash the tree. Experts offer these tips for the oft-dreaded task of putting it all away.

### **Clean, then organize**

Professional organizer Rita McGhee of Charleston suggests cleaning all of your holiday decorations before storing them.

First, take a vacuum to your artificial tree prior to storage. "Think of all the dust it collects as it sits in your house for a month or more!" Large duffel bags are a terrific alternative if the branches are too large to fit in a traditional plastic bin, and easier to carry than the large, original boxes.

The organizational expert said outdoor decorations, including inflatables, should be wiped clean with a damp cloth and thoroughly dried before storage. A mild soapy solution can be used on soiled areas or on items that touch or go into the ground. She cleans natural or dried wreaths or fragile ornaments and figurines with a small, soft paintbrush. Ornaments with intricate details or those made from cloth can be dusted with a gentle burst from canned compressed air (commonly used for computer keyboards).

Next, organize the items before storing.

Store children's artwork in large envelopes or in collapsed boxes. "There's no need to buy an artist's portfolio," McGhee said. "Just flatten a box and keep the paper items inside."

Light strands should be wrapped around a used wrapping paper roll or flat piece of cardboard. Remember to snip small slots to slide in the beginning and ends of each strand.

To avoid wrapping each ornament individually, fill a box with shredded paper and place the ornaments in the box. Remember to start saving the contents of your home shredder early in the season, or shred newspapers right before packing. "All ornaments aren't the same size or shape, so those sectioned boxes aren't always the best fit," McGhee said.

Storing artificial wreaths? McGhee suggests this technique: Slide the wreath's hanging loop over the hook of a sturdy hanger. Slide a plastic trash bag over the wreath like a shirt, allowing the opening to be at the bottom. Snip a small 1/4-inch hole at the sealed end of the bag to allow the hanger hook to slide through. Use a twist-tie or pull the drawstring to close the bottom of the bag. Hang the covered wreath on a hook or closet rod.

If there's no place to hang wreaths, place them in a box with a large sheet of cardboard between them.

Finally, McGhee suggests renting items like linens, dishes, glasses and tables during the holidays.

"Don't store it! At our house these things are usually used only once a year," she said. "If you're using them more often, storage is OK, but if it's really only at the holidays, then consider rentals."

McGhee said after the holiday is the best time to see what's falling apart. Pitch, don't pack, items that can't be repaired.

"But sometimes people throw away things that don't have to be tossed," McGhee said. "Felt and plastic bows, with light cleaning, can be saved. If you can't find the original packaging for the static clings that decorate windows, put them on waxed paper." Place the sheets of clings inside an envelope, file folder or cardboard taped together on two sides to help them stay flat during storage.

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