

## HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR NAVAJO TEXTILES:

- Hand dyed colors in older rugs are not color-fast and may 'bleed' if washed or wet.
- Valuable textiles should also be kept away from direct sunlight, open windows, exterior doors, house plants and pets, as dirt, dust and insects may lead to serious problems.
- Avoid areas with fluctuations in heat and humidity like a bathroom.
- If placing a rug on the floor, use fiber pads not foam rubber, and turn it periodically to avoid excessive wear.
- Vacuum your floor rug using a brushless head.
- If your rug needs to be washed, take it only to a specialized cleaner.
- There are various methods for hanging Navajo textiles – consult your dealer for the best method for your rug or blanket.
- If you need to store your textiles, wrap in a clean sheet or towel and use a cedar chest or cedar strips to keep away insects.
- Do not moth-proof your textiles as this leaves a chemical residue on the fabric.



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# COLLECTING NAVAJO WEAVING



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# COLLECTING NAVAJO WEAVING

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## NAVAJO PEOPLE OF THE

Southwest U.S. make traditional woolen rugs and blankets. These textiles are highly regarded and have been sought after as trade items and by collectors for over 150 years.

Navajo textiles were originally made for cloaks, dresses, blankets, saddle blankets and other items for everyday use. When the railroads arrived in the Southwest at the end of the 19th century, weavers began to make rugs for tourism and export.

It is generally believed that weaving skills were brought to the Navajo by Pueblo people fleeing from the Spanish after the Pueblo Revolt in 1680. The pueblo weavers originally used cotton, but Navajo women quickly learned and adapted their skills using wool from the thousands of sheep that the Spanish had introduced to the area. Today the vast majority of weavers are still women.



Traditional Navajo upright looms are a simple structure with no moving parts. Support poles are traditionally made of wood but today may also be metal. The warp (the lengthwise threads) is attached to cross poles at the top and bottom. The weaver sits on the floor during weaving and, as it grows, wraps the finished portion underneath the loom. She pushes threads through the warp with her fingers and pummels it tightly into place with a wooden comb.

Typical Navajo textiles usually have bold, geometric designs and some have pictorial designs taken from traditional sand paintings. Before the mid-19th century, colors were mostly natural browns and white, and indigo dye obtained through trading. In the middle of the century colors also included red, black, green, yellow and gray. Traditional weavers still spin and dye their own yarn, sometimes from their own sheep. Most contemporary weavers use commercially prepared yarns.

At the end of the 19th century, merchants and trading post owners began to influence Navajo weaving, encouraging weavers to produce rugs for the eastern market. Traders encouraged local people to weave rugs and blankets into distinct styles. Some of these are:

- *Two Gray Hills* – high quality, natural colored wool in geometric designs

- *Ganado* – red dominated patterns with black and white
- *Teec Nos Pos* – colorful with extensive patterns
- *Chinle* – banded geometric patterns
- *Red Mesa* – bold diamond patterns

According to Navajo tradition, a spiritual being called “Spider Woman” instructed Navajo women how to build the first loom and how to weave, so that they may create beauty in their lives. An authentic Navajo rug or blanket can take months, or even years, of skilled and meticulous work to complete. These items are truly works of art and look beautiful as wall-hangings.

Enjoy looking at all the different sizes and styles until you find one that you just have to take home!

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