

Caring for Your Pipes

You're finished playing your bagpipes and aren't quite sure what to do with them when you are done. What steps are necessary to properly stow your pipes after playing will depend on a number of factors, primarily having to do with moisture control. The following advice pertains to the care of wood bagpipes. Poly pipes also have maintenance issues and moisture is a primary concern.

Chanter

Most pipers remove the chanter from its stock and place the chanter in a chanter cap which covers the end of the chanter and protects the reed. In most locales, a chanter reed will develop mold more quickly if the chanter is left attached to the bag when not in use. And sometimes the chanter may become stuck in its stock—not exactly the most desirable situation! Remove any beaded moisture on your reed by gently pressing it with a tissue for a few seconds, though some pipers go so far as checking the reed against their lip for any wet feeling. Some recommend leaving the reed exposed to air for 5 minutes before stowing it in a cap. If you do air out your reed, be extremely protective of it, you don't want it getting whacked or rolling off of a table or chair!

If you are in a dry climate such as Denver, Colorado (high altitude) you could just leave the chanter in its stock on the bag to help the reed retain moisture. In cold temperatures or after lots of playing, moisture may condense on the inside of your chanter. Ideally, this condensation should be wiped out after playing.

Drones

Most pipers can get away without doing much to their drones after playing. But again, you don't want moisture sitting inside the bores of your drones. If this is an issue for you, a "pull through"—a string with a rag strips at one end—may be used to wipe out the larger bores of your drones.

Now, if you do happen to own a set of poly pipes, you'll find that condensation beads up more easily on plastic than wood and that moisture may run down and clog your reeds. It wouldn't hurt to check your bores and wipe them out when necessary.

Drone reeds

Condensation on the tongues of synthetic drone reeds is very common, even with dry blowers. It's good practice to dry the body of the reeds after playing and wipe out under the tongue using a thin durable paper—paper currency (i.e., a dollar bill) works well since it's designed to not tear easily. Nose tissue and toilet paper is not recommended (too fragile)—nor is a business card which may have the unintended consequence of springing the tongue, affecting both efficiency and tone.

Bag

If you have a synthetic or hybrid bag with a zipper, then you will probably want unzip your bag to allow it dry out. With a hide bag, you want to avoid having it dry out, but you also don't want it super moist either. You can help retain moisture by plugging any open

stocks with a cork. A hide bag will gradually dry out even with all the stocks plugged—particularly if it's a sheepskin bag. If it's necessary to dry an overly-wet bag then leave one or more of the stocks open. Use a mild disinfectant to occasionally wipe over the lining of the synthetic bag – the moisture serves as a breeding ground for a variety of molds and bacteria.

Into the Case

A pipe case serves a number of purposes. It allows you to carry quite a number of items easily; it protects your pipes from impacts, and can also somewhat serve to prevent rapid changes in temperature and humidity. When you place your pipes in their case, you don't want so much leeway that the pipes knock around and chip, scratch or dent. You also don't want to force the pipes into the case so that they are on the verge of cracking—while drones and stocks are reasonably solid overall, the tuning pins are particularly vulnerable as is the chanter. And remember, if you employ a hose system, make sure these lie flat as you don't want any kinks.

If your case is overly stuffed you might consider weeding out nonessential items (particularly items that could scratch or otherwise damage your pipes) or if they are all things you need readily available, investigate a larger case.

Storing/Moving your Pipes

A good piece of advice is to think of your bagpipes as your baby. Don't leave it in a car unattended. Play with it often. Don't drop it or throw it. Don't leave it wet (empty/dry your moisture traps). Don't force things to move if they are really stuck. If it screeches, it probably needs some attention. And singing tunes to it (canntaireachd) won't hurt!

Bottom line; treat your pipes to a mild environment that would be very comfortable for you personally. So if your car is a very mild environment and will stay that way while you are gone, then, yes, you can leave your pipes on the seat—but it better be a very overcast and not too hot or too cold of a day!

If you take good care of your bagpipes, they will take care of you. Yes, some pipers are lucky and can get away with not taking proper of their pipes, but sooner or later, it's going to come back and haunt them!