

# Water damaged book solutions:

Simply place the books in a frost-free freezer. It is important to place the books in the freezer while they are still wet (do not dry them out first, and do not open them while they are wet and damp). The frost-free freezer will slowly dry the books while stopping any damage (the frost-free part works by evaporating the moisture in the pages and the book). If a frost-free freezer is not available, the books may be frozen in a regular freezer until a frost-free freezer is available. Once in the frost-free freezer, wait a couple of days to open the books (you need to wait until the books are completely frozen - that way you will not tear any pages which have temporarily stuck together) and then after that turn a few pages each day so that the drying process goes through the entire book. In my experience, it took about three weeks to fully dry a book which had been completely soaked, and which survived without any water or dampstains. I also dried some manuscript letters and diaries this way, and it worked just fine.

Of course, the space in anyone's freezer is limited, but this will allow the most important or rare books to be saved. The same process will work for photograph albums and glossy paper items (magazines), as long as the albums and magazines are not opened while they are still wet. So resist the urge to glance inside that soaked book or collectible, and stick it in your frost-free freezer instead. While this is not the most ideal method of conservation, it will work to help save a lot of items which might otherwise be lost by waiting.

But if there is the slightest risk of mold, whether or not you see or smell any (which can result if it took longer than 48 hours to get the books frozen, or they were flooded with dirty water, or were in a basement or other mold-prone environment at the time they were flooded, etc) then once they are dry you will want to keep them apart from your other books for about a month to make sure you don't have a sudden "bloom" that spreads to undamaged books. Mold will show up under leather, between paper and laminates, coated end papers, gutters, and in the wheat paste and animal glues of 19th century bindings (modern PVA seems unbothered by mold). Those areas may appear dry when they are not. Despite extreme caution, I ran into this when dealing with flooded library books in the 1970s and again when my parents' house was flooded in the 1990s, and post-flood mold growth was the major issue in a recent lawsuit in which I was a consultant and witness here in Texas.

If you end up with even a little mold on something you want to save, immediately refreeze it and contact a professional conservator.

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