

THE TOOLS

#4 GET PROFESSIONAL

If you want to get serious about stamp collecting, you need the cool tools of the pro! Here are some of the most important ones.

Tongs. Tongs look like tweezers but have special tips that won't harm stamps. Use them to pick up and handle stamps. Natural skin oil makes stamps dirty.

Magnifier. This great tool will help see stamp details. Look for flaws, differences, and tiny variations. Choose a lens that magnifies clearly, without distortion, and with at least 5 times to 10 times magnification.

Perforation Gauge. This tool measures perforations -- the number of "holes" or "teeth" per two centimeters of stamp edge. For example, if there are ten perforation holes in two centimeters of edge, the stamp is called a perf.10. The "same" stamps with different perforations are actually different stamps worth different amounts.

Watermark Detector. Put a stamp in a watermark tray, pour in a special fluid, and see if an invisible watermark appears. (A watermark is an invisible design pressed into paper to help prevent forgery.)

Storage Containers. Keep your stamps clean and fresh in stock pages, glassine envelopes, or a storage album until you are ready to mount them. Stock pages have rows of pockets for stamps.

TIP: Where can you buy stamp collecting tools? Look in your Yellow Pages telephone directory under "Stamps for Collectors" or visit the American Philatelic Society's directory at http://www.stamps.org/directories/dir_DealerMembers.htm

HOW TO USE A HINGE

Pick up the hinge with your fingers.

Moisten the short end just a little.

Position it on back of the stamp so the short fold is under the stamp's top edge.

Pick up the stamp with the tongs.

Moisten the tip of the long end.

Place it onto your album page and firmly press the stamp on the page under a piece of clean paper or cardboard.

HOW TO USE A MOUNT

Trim the mount to the right size.

Slip the stamp in.

Moisten one flap of the mount and press it onto the album page.