

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

Storage Solutions

With the huge variety of organizing products out there, it's easy to become overwhelmed — and cash-strapped — when shopping for containers. A professional organizer can help you demystify the myriad of bins, boxes, and baskets so you purchase products within your budget that will be beneficial for you and your spaces.

You can also try some of the creative storage solutions in this issue of *Organize Today*. You'll discover new uses for old containers and under-utilized spaces. And if you want to purchase *new* organizing products, you'll read about some inexpensive (and multi-purpose) items that can work wonders!

Sort it out



The first thing — before you ever step foot in a store with the intention of buying organizing paraphernalia — is to sort, pare down, and evaluate your stuff. Whether it's a closet crammed with clothes or a tiny junk drawer full of oddball items, you can't contain it until you follow these steps:

1) Sort: Pick a space to tackle, and gather similar things together into piles. For example, if you're organizing your bathroom, separate out hair-care products, first-aid supplies, towels/linens, make-up, paper products, etc. Once you can clearly see *everything* you have...

2) Pare down: You probably own much more than you originally thought, so start tossing! Get rid of anything broken, stained, or past its prime. Then, for remaining items, ask yourself if each item is truly beautiful, useful, or loved. If not, it's time to go! Recycle, donate, or share those things with someone who really needs them, and then...

3) Evaluate what's left: You probably don't have nearly as much stuff as when you started! That's a good thing. Now that you're down to the essentials, you can...

4) Find the right spot: Decide where you'll store each category of items, take note of the size of the spaces you have, and figure out what type of storage containers will work best. (Use a tape measure!) Now, you can begin either shopping for new containers or creatively reusing ones that you already own, saving environmental resources and money.

Multi-purpose, affordable storage containers

Junk drawer organizers

This helpful product is an organizing super-performer! Use one in your office to separate out rubber bands, paper clips, erasers, and other small office essentials. Stash them in the bathroom to hold cosmetics and first-aid items. Put them in kids' rooms to hold small toys or hair accessories. Sort out nails and screws in the workshop. Or separate small craft supplies like beads and wires or sewing accouterments. Drawer organizers are available in a variety of price ranges, sizes, and materials (cardboard, clear acrylic, plastic, and wood). If you need maximum flexibility, look for one with adjustable compartments, so you can create the right sized spaces for anything in your drawer.



Flexible laundry baskets



Containerizing your stuff is great, but buying all those bins and boxes can get expensive! Laundry baskets can be an affordable option. Watch for them on sale at your local discount store. You'll also find some pretty wicker ones at craft stores (such as Michael's and JoAnn Fabrics) for under \$5. Use them all over your home, such as to contain toys, books, or magazines in the living room. Then, put one at the bottom of the stairs. Throughout the day, drop in everything that needs to go "up," making evening clean-up quick and painless. Place one near the exit door for things that need to leave the house — clothing that needs to go to the tailor or dry cleaner, items that need to be returned to stores, library books and movies ready for return, and loaned items that need to find their rightful owners. Or keep a basket in the trunk of your car. Take a peek in the box each morning and see what you can get rid of that day.

Multi-purpose photo boxes

Photo storage boxes are great for organizing more than photos! These inexpensive, versatile tools can be used to store crafts, office supplies, jewelry, small toys, bathroom doo-dads, and so much more. For under \$5 each, these boxes are an organizing best-buy. Label them clearly with a label maker or Sharpie pen.



Vertical space-savers

Over-the-door pocket organizers — usually reserved for shoe storage — are wonderfully versatile. Hang one in a kid's room to store Barbie and her accessories or toy cars and trucks. Mount one on the wall near the baby's changing table to hold powder, diapers, and other necessities. Set up a gift wrapping station with ribbons, bows, tags, tissue, cards, and tape. Or keep one on the back of the pantry door to hold spice packets, Jello boxes, or kitchen gadgets. Choose clutter-hiding canvas or easy-to-see-through clear vinyl, depending upon your needs.



Likewise, hanging sweater organizers can keep much-needed items at your fingertips. Use them in your bedroom closet to hold folded clothing like sweaters and T-shirts, or stash accessories like purses, belts, and hats. Get shoes off the floor by popping them into a narrower version of this organizer that holds ten pairs. And they work wonders in an entryway closet. Keep small outerwear — such as hats, mittens, baseball caps, sunscreen, camera, dog leash, binoculars, and umbrellas ready to grab on the way out the door.



Finding space for your papers

According to Harris Interactive, 23% of adults say they pay bills late (and thus incur fees) because they lose them. Ouch! If papers are taking over *your* space, you need a new system to contain them.

If you don't have an official office, not to worry! You can set up an efficient, portable filing system in *any* room. (Often, the kitchen works well because it's the hub of activity.)



There are many great organizing products available to contain your papers. One method features hanging file folders (with labeled tabs) in a portable file box (plastic or fabric-covered cardboard with lid work great, or use a basic plastic crate). Label tabs for categories of papers you need on a regular basis, such as unpaid bills, schedules, take-out menus, and upcoming events. Then, file away!

Of course, you can also use a standard filing cabinet. Just make sure it's in an accessible spot, so you don't forget to use it — out of sight is out of mind. If you're purchasing a new filing cabinet, be sure to first sort through and purge as many old papers as possible. Remember, we tend to reference only 20% of the papers we keep. So toss out outdated product manuals, product solicitations, articles that you clipped but never read, duplicates of documents, and anything that's no longer relevant in your life. If you can find the information online, toss it! Then, before shopping for a new filing cabinet, take note of the amount of space you'll need. Purchase accordingly, and make sure the drawers glide nicely and are easy to open.

To make bill-paying easy, fill a small plastic supply box (or use an empty checkbook box) with office essentials such as pens, checkbook, stamps, note cards, envelopes, address labels, mini-stapler, and tape. You'll never again have an excuse to pay late.

Discovering space under, inside, and up

Think you're out of space? Even if you live in a tiny apartment or house, you can take advantage of these spaces and maximize your storage capabilities.

Under: Don't neglect the space under your bed! It's great for off-season clothing storage or hand-me-down kids' clothes, extra blankets, and memory-box/sentimental items. If your bed is low, purchase some inexpensive bed risers (about \$10 per set) at your bed and bath store. This will raise the bed about six inches, allowing under-bed plastic or cardboard storage boxes to slide in easily.

Inside: When shopping for end tables, coffee tables, or benches, be sure to look for those that have storage inside. That way, you utilize not only the space on top, but also the space inside or underneath. In your closets, maximize space by installing a double-hang closet

rod. Inside cupboard doors, hang a cork board to post phone numbers and shopping lists. Or hang hooks (3M Command Hooks work well) to hold just about anything! Finally, use the height of your cabinets wisely by adjusting shelves to suit the items they hold.

Up: There are all sorts of great organizing products available to help you maximize wall space. Pegs and hooks can be used in the entry way to hold jackets and backpacks; in the bathroom they hold robes or hair dryers; or add to a closet to store the next day's outfit. Hang a net hammock in a kid's room to store stuffed animals up and out of the way. You can even use the ceiling to hang pots and pans from a ceiling-mounted rack. Install floor-to-ceiling shelves or cubbies, and you won't waste an inch of wall space. Keep frequently used items at eye level or below, saving the top space for seldom-used things or decorative items.

Save money with recycled containers

Whether you're on a budget or just want to do your part to protect our environment, recycling and repurposing household organizing containers make good sense. Here are a few ideas to get you started...

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Shoe boxes: They're the perfect size and shape for holding so much more than shoes. Stash small gardening tools, sorts socks, or hold special cards. Use your imagination!

Oatmeal boxes, coffee cans, and tall potato chip containers: These drum-shaped containers can hold anything tall and lean, from kitchen implements to paintbrushes.

Check boxes: Organize office supplies, such as pens, rubber bands, index cards, note cards, and envelopes. Or configure a few in your junk drawer for a perfect fit.

Film canisters and mint tins: These cute containers can hold tiny things like push pins or paper clips. They also make great travel buddies for jewelry.

Tissue boxes: Use them to store plastic shopping bags (when you need one, they pop out one at a time!) or collect trash in your car.



Baby food jars: Separate nails, screws, washers, and other hardware by size.

Laundry detergent boxes: Decorate with colored paper and use them to hold magazines.



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