

Storage savvy: An organized home in ten easy steps

By Erin K. Witt

When it comes to household organization, home economics teachers have long heralded the advice, “a place for everything, and everything in its place.” However, a home lacking usable storage space can make organization difficult.

Many homeowners find keeping on top of clutter a challenge, but the following tips can help boost storage within the home and provide the space—if not the time—to get your possessions in check.

Tip #1: Prioritize and categorize your belongings. The Web site *Spacelimited.com* recommends homeowners begin any organization project by first asking the following questions.

- How often do I need this item?
- Will I ever use it again?
- Can I live without it?
- If it is a decorative item, does it go well with the rest of the home decor?
- Is it kept because of sentimental reasons?

Tip #2: Store all regularly used items in conspicuous, easily accessible areas. Tables and countertops should only accommodate things that are used almost every day. Rarely used or seasonal items should be packed away in a chest or another less accessible part of the storage area, to make space for the more regularly used ones. Items that are never used, but that you can't bear to part with, usually have sentimental value. Sometimes, these items even increase in value with time, like antiques, so they should be packed securely away to prevent loss or damage. Junk—items you don't need anymore—should be disposed of. They can be thrown away, sold on a yard sale, or donated to a shelter or resale store.

Tip #3: Bust garage clutter by adding smart storage, says *Better Homes and Gardens*. A garage with a high ceiling allows plenty of room on the back wall for cubbyhole cabinetry and wall-hung wire racks. Adjustable shelves will accommodate camping gear and other bulky items, while smaller items, like holiday ornaments, can be packed in stackable containers. The same system can be configured to organize everything from snow skis to long-handled tools. Most important, wall storage helps clear a path by lifting everything off the floor. And the storage is easily modified to meet your changing needs. For example, the clips to hold rakes and shovels can be replaced by shelves, or even drawers.

Tip #4: Use kitchen space creatively. Attach racks to the inside of cabinet doors to boost storage options—but be sure to allow enough clearance inside the cabinets for racks that tidily stow paper products, cautions *Better Homes and Gardens*. Or, turn a bare section of wall into a hook-and-hang center to keep kitchen tools handy. For more storage, add accessories, such as spice racks and cookbook holders.

Tip #5: Bring the pantry closer to you. A pullout pantry system has wire shelf sides that prevent items from falling out and allow easy viewing of the contents. Shifting dry goods into airtight, stackable containers can also save space. Often, packaged food can be stored more compactly when transferred from their packaging into stacking containers.

Tip #6: In the bathroom, try over-the-toilet options. Cabinets and shelves can occupy space over the toilet without interfering with its use. Make sure that shelves and wall-mount cabinets allow enough clearance to remove the tank lid to repair the toilet. Other creative options can open up space, too. Bathroom towels can be stored attractively stacked and rolled up in an oversized wicker basket. Towels or magazines can also be hung from an antique wooden ladder in your bathroom.

Tip #7: Family bathrooms often have limited space—so give each family member a personal plastic tote. *Better Homes and Gardens* recommends everyone store bathroom basics in a portable storage unit that can be returned to their bedroom after use.

Tip #8: Put staircase space to use. Many partially open staircases feature banisters you could easily replace with modular storage units. This is a great place for a bookshelf, or to display photos.

Tip #9: Incorporate storage into the furniture you buy. A front hallway bench can hold gloves, scarves, and hats. Coffee tables with storage compartments can hide back issues of magazines, and kids' rooms gain the equivalent of an additional dresser when a captain's bed is substituted for the usual box spring and mattress.

Tip #10: Create do-it-yourself storage options. Decorative screens are a popular way to define a room's space, or maintain privacy. Adding fabric pockets to the panels are a fun way to add storage options, says the Web site *Decor24.com*. Use the pockets to organize magazines, newspapers or unopened mail. Decorated empty coffee cans or wooden craft boxes can also make great looking storage containers that can be used in virtually any room in the house. Boxes can be decorated with left over wallpaper scraps, colored corrugated paper and twine or sponge art.