

# Organizing Your Clutter

*A supplement to*  
*Secret Confessions of a Clean Freak*

## Organizing Clutter

Stuff, Stuff, Stuff, it's everywhere! Figurines, papers, magazines, toys.....

First, here are some tips for getting a grip on the clutter.

### Use spare minutes.

If you're sitting in front of the TV, sort through a stack of papers or magazines.

When you get a magazine, go through it and pull out the things you want to read or save. Put them in folders by category. Throw the rest of the magazine in the recycle bin.

Take 15 minutes and look at the clothes hanging in the closet. What needs to be thrown out? What can you give to charity? If you haven't worn something in a while, there is someone else who can use it and would probably love to have it. We purge our closets and drawers twice a year.

The linen closet is a total disaster? Take 5 minutes and straighten one shelf. Try different ways of folding your towels. Depending on the width of your linen closet, sometimes they fit better folded in half, sometimes folded in thirds.

Have tons of bottles of lotions, shampoos, soaps, and things you bought to try or received as gifts that you don't like and don't use? Throw them out! You will never use them, so why leave them taking up space?

You will accomplish far more in little 5-minute chunks than you could imagine. When you keep putting off projects until you have more time, you'll never start. We just don't have more time. That's reality.

Managing the flow of stuff can be overwhelming. But with shelves, bins and baskets we can do it. Read on for more great organizing solutions.

## Using Shelves

I love shelves. They can be purely functional, or they can be decorative and interesting.

In my daughter's room when she was little, I used white plastic shelves. They snap together, no tools required. They wipe down easily. You can put them together in different configurations. When she got older, these shelves were moved downstairs for storage.

You can also use these plastic shelves for an easy way to keep your plants. You don't have to worry about water spots or damage from over watering. They are easy to keep clean. Just wipe down.

You can find these shelves at Menards, Office Depot or Stacks and Stacks, or Target.

In the storeroom, use metal shelving units. The inexpensive ones can be used for things such as Christmas decorations, or pictures. Lighter things. I did try boxes of books, but the cheaper shelves did not hold up very well :(

When it's time to find shelves that look good, well, here I had a lot of fun. You can search online at places like Stacks and Stacks, and Target, Improvements and Ace Hardware to look for shelves. You would not believe all of the different kinds of shelves that came up. There were lots of beautiful shelves that would go in any number of decors. You could go crazy picking out your favorites.



I even found my old stand by; the unfinished shelves. I have a lot of antiques, so these are a great affordable item for me. I finish them in mahogany or walnut, depending on the room it's for. You can find unfinished shelves at Ace Hardware. Stacks and Stacks has the new Slide and Slot shelving where no hardware shows. And be on the look out for unusual shelves at antique stores and garage sales.

When my daughter was young, she had a pretty extensive music box collection. We used 2 - eight foot shelves hung higher up on the wall. I used the adjustable shelf holders where you slide in the brackets to hold the shelves. In our next apartment, these same shelves were used to hold cookbooks and kitchen knick-knacks. She has a new set in her newest room.



You can put up a narrow shelf around the entire room topping the door frames and windows to hold small knick-knacks. Like the old plate rails.

In the living room and dining room, I like to have shelves mixed in with the picture arrangements. This gives you space for figures up out of the traffic flow. During the holidays, I change the figures. I simply switch the everyday figures with the holiday figures, putting them in the holiday box for storage during the holiday season.



A shelf with pegs by the door is great for coats, gloves and hats.

Shelves in the kitchen can hold cookbooks, coffee mugs, decorative items, canisters, small appliances, and plants.



Shelves in the bathroom can hold air-fresheners, decorative containers to hold cotton balls and cotton swabs.

Shelves in the bedrooms can hold collections, books, pictures, colognes, decorative boxes to hold pins and such.

Shelves can be put over windows. There are even shelves made with curtain rods attached for this purpose.

**Important Note : Make sure your wall shelves are anchored correctly!**

We collect things. We have hundreds of books. Tons of toys. My life would be totally unmanageable without shelves!

## **Baskets, boxes and bins**

### **Decorative ways to stay organized**

OK, now you have a bunch of stuff on shelves and you still have stuff all over your tables. Will you ever get it organized?

Of Course you will. Stick with me. Look around at where you have stuff that accumulates.

#### ***Living-room***

Storage benches and ottomans are a great way to stash clutter.

Put magazines in a large basket in the living room. I use a wicker laundry basket. I have a girlfriend who uses a log basket. Get imaginative!







If you have open space under your coffee table, you can put a couple of attractive baskets or boxes underneath there too.

## ***Entry***

Keep keys in a basket or on pegs by the door.

Keep a basket on a shelf or in the coat closet for hats, gloves, umbrellas and such.

Keep a basket or small bin by the door to drop mail in.

There are hundreds of different hanging mail-sorters that can be used to go with any décor.

## ***Paper Problems***

This is the biggest challenge in our house. We get so much paper: bills, magazines, catalogs, newspapers, school papers, the paper trail never ends!

Use a vertical sorter to keep bills, catalogs, school notices, and other things you need to tend to neat and organized. You can find a selection at Office Max. Go through the mail once, sort it into it's compartment. Immediately throw out anything that isn't needed.

Shred or destroy anything with personally identifiable information on it. Especially



all those credit card offers.

Keep a good-sized covered basket or decorative covered box on hand to quickly hide papers when company comes. Being a writer, I have tons of paper for research and inspiration. I have 3 hidden locations in my great room where I can quickly stash my piles of papers.

Bombay has some great small trunks. Also try places like Pier 1 and World Market.

### ***Pictures***

You know how you never have time to get those pictures into albums? I put the most recent pictures in decorative boxes so they will be viewed.

I store my pictures in shoebox sized boxes and then place them in 20 gallon covered plastic bins.

I know, this is not the recommended method for preserving your pictures, but - I have pictures that are over 100 years old. They have survived this treatment so far! We still take pictures out on rainy days and look through them.

### ***The Abyss on the Desk***

I have a lot of space under my desk. Crates turned on their side make great additional storage. I have a stack of 8 file boxes (like the old in-baskets) under the desk. Then I can sort and stash my piles of papers out of view.

Use stackable bins on the desktop. Use small plastic bins/boxes to sort paperclips, supplies, pens/pencils, disks, post-it notes, and so on.

Make it a mission to keep your eyes open for boxes and baskets you can use. You can find them at antique stores, garage sales, art & craft shows. You never know where you will find something really neat that will fit perfectly in your home.

### ***Recyclables are Everywhere***

Put your recycle bin right at the door so you can easily drop your cans and bottles. Make sure you rinse out the bottles and cans to keep bees and bugs down.

Use another bin near the door for magazines and newspapers. Or, you can use a large paper bag to collect the papers and magazines. Then you can just pick up

the bag and dispose of the whole thing.

You can use a couple S hooks to hook an extra bag on the outside of your garbage can for cans and bottles.

For those of you that still drink pop - the cardboard case that you get pop in works great for newspapers too.

I am surprised that no one has come up with a garbage can design to accommodate all this garbage sorting. I designed the ultimate garbage can, but I never could afford the patent process. I thought sure someone would have solved these problems by now...

## **More Organized Solutions**

### ***Cleaning up the cleaning***

Get a small crate with a handle, or a basket, or a bucket to carry cleaning supplies from room to room. When you're done, slip the basket into the closet.

Another option would be to keep cleaning supplies in each room. This is a great time saver in the bathroom and kitchen.

### ***In the Bedroom***

Invest in under-bed drawers and boxes for sweaters, clothes that are only worn occasionally, and out of season clothes. Hide it all with dust ruffles.

You can get bed elevators that will raise your bed a little and allow for more storage underneath. Online you can find them at places like Improvements and Stacks and Stacks.

I use cardboard drawers in my closet to hold underwear, socks, belts, and junk.

### ***Kitchen***

Small boxes can be used all over the house. I use one to keep vitamins in. I use another for gravy mixes, salad dressing mixes and stuff like that. I stand them up. It's easy to find what you're looking for, and they stay neat.



I use stackable rubber coated wire racks for dishes, cups, glasses, canned goods, pots and pans, under the kitchen sink and on the floor of the linen closet. I even have a couple stacked under my desk. There are hundreds of kitchen solutions from racks to increase cabinet space, to lid holders to keep your pan lids organized. There are all sorts of cute cabinets available for kitchen storage that match any décor. Check Improvements, Stacks and Stacks, The Container Store, and Target, and for some great ideas.

## ***Bathroom***

There are tons of little cabinets and storage ideas available for bathrooms. Everything from skinny little cabinets, to over toilet units, to baskets.

Use a decorative basket to hold an extra roll of toilet paper. You can also use one of those macramé plant holders hung next to the toilet. Or, you can buy something weird like the outhouse toilet paper holder.

You can also use a plant hanger with a decorative pot to hold brushes or hairdryers and such next to the sink. One of those hanging vegetable baskets would work too. Spruce it up with some ribbon or flowers or other decorations. A decorative flowerpot also makes a good toilet brush holder.

## ***Outdoors***

Use a large covered bin outside, or in the garage to hold outdoor toys, Frisbees, balls, bats, sand toys, roller blades, pads, etc. etc. You can use the large chest for storing your patio cushions and deflated beach toys. Make sure the lid is secure to mice can't get in and ruin your things.

Use yet another bin for gardening tools, pots, and dirt. Or you can get a potting cart that provides a workspace on top, and storage underneath.

You can use plastic shelves for a make shift gardening work area. The only drawback is that you have to bring it all in before winter.

## ***Garage/Work Area***

Invest in one of those plastic organizers with the little drawers. Keep all of the screws and nails separated and organized. This will save you from pulling your hair out a million times over.

Have 2 toolboxes. In one, keep the tools that you need the most often.

Shelves, or discarded kitchen cabinets can be installed in the garage for storing tools, potting supplies, car care supplies, and so on.

If you're really ambitious, install rafter storage solutions. Make use of all that empty space above.

## ***Kid Friendly Solutions***



If you don't have room in your entertainment center, you can get a good-sized hinged or covered box/basket to hold all of the Nintendo and Play-Station controllers and games. Everything is put away nice and neat.

Invest in a number of Rubbermaid and/or Sterlite boxes for kid's rooms. Have a different bin for each type of toy. One for cars, one for crayons, one for dogs or other small figures, one for dinosaurs, well, you get the idea. This helps your kids learn how to keep things neat and organized too. Don't expect miracles overnight, but if you make it simple for them, eventually they do get the idea. Really.

I've used a rolling cart for my daughter's art supplies. The top shelf had plastic

boxes – shoe box size: one for crayons, one for colored pencils, and one for sharpeners, scissors, erasers, and such. The middle shelf had bins of markers. The bottom shelf was for Playdoh supplies.

For years we had a huge Rubbermaid bin in the corner of the dining room with art supplies, puzzles, coloring books, and anything they would do on the dining room table. When they were done, all the stuff had to go back in the bin and the top on. That included all the neighborhood kids too. (I also protected the table with a vinyl tablecloth. Ugly, but effective.)

We used plastic crates for coloring books, construction paper, beanie babies, and small stuffed animals. They stack well, and are easily movable.

## ***Storage Solutions***

One of the hardest places to keep organized is our storage areas, isn't it? You just kind throw things in there until it just can hold any more without falling over. And forget trying to find anything. Wouldn't it be nice to have it all organized?

The ultimate in storage are the 20 gallon covered bins. They will keep your stored items clean and dry. They are not so big that they would get overly heavy. And they stack nice and neat. It can get expensive. Start with a few at a time. Watch for sales. They are usually on sale pretty cheap after Christmas, or during back to school sales.

Start with Christmas decorations. Use Masking tape to make labels for the outside of the bins. Then it can be changed easily.

Another of my novel tips: I wrap my Christmas decorations in paper towels. They stay cleaner, and it doesn't take up as much room as keeping the original boxes. Pack the bins full so there is not a lot of room for things to move around, but don't cram it so that things will get broken or crushed. I have ornaments that are over 50 years old. I've lost more ornaments due to kids and pets than anything else.

The next best storage option is bankers boxes. They are relatively sturdy, stack well, and hold quite a bit. I use Fellows #703. You can get a package of 10 fairly inexpensively if you watch the sales at popular office supply stores.

Anywhere you have stuff that seems to accumulate, get some boxes or baskets to contain it. There are all sorts of shapes, sizes and materials to match any décor. Have some fun with it. Get creative. And always keep your eyes open for decorative solutions.

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