

Home Life Style

Home Organization for the New Year

Simple solutions for achieving and maintaining an organized home.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

The holiday season is now a festive memory, and Yuletide decorations are packed away. The New Year offers an opportunity for a fresh start and a chance to get organized.

For some, the thought of sifting through unruly closets, disheveled desk drawers and messy cabinets is overwhelming. But experts say clearing out a clutter conundrum can actually bring serenity.

"Organizing is good for the mind and emotions," said Margaret Buco, owner of Organizing-by-Margaret in Potomac. "When a home is organized, stress and chaos are lessened and are replaced by efficiency and freedom."

When faced with linen closets that hold everything from batteries to extensions cords, and kitchen drawers that are home to items ranging from hammers to toothpaste, it is difficult to know where to start. Local professional organizers say there are simple steps to home organization and believe it is wise to work incrementally.

"The best thing to do is begin with your most difficult area and break your project down into small pieces so it is not overwhelming," said Sally Reinholdt of Closets 911 in Alexandria.

DECIDE which organizational hotspots cause the most angst and tackle those first. "Let's say it is the closet," said Potomac-based organizer Nancy Atkinson Patch of Not-A-Problem. "Pull everything out and then take a good look at the space."

Once the space is empty, start to visual-



Susan Unger, a Vienna-based organizer, says that an organized home creates serenity.



One of the keys to organization is creating specific spaces for household items.



ize the possibilities.

"Go into a room or space and really daydream about what you want that room to be," said Eileen LaGreca, owner of Sensational Spaces in Fairfax. "What is its function? How do you use it? Then plan what you want to have happen in that space."

Next, divide the contents of the room into categories. "Set up a sorting station," said Atkinson Patch. "Get everything in one spot, and then start grouping so you can get a handle on what it is you're dealing with."

Belongings should fall into three categories:

those to keep, those to donate and those to discard. Experts say be ruthless. "This is an excellent quality to have when you are organizing," said Atkinson Patch. "Look at the items and ask, 'Have I used this in five years?' If the answer is no, it is time for the item to go bye-bye. Hang trash bags on the door knobs while you're organizing."

Create specific spaces for each object. "There is a saying: 'A place for everything and everything in its place.' Buy appropriate storage containers and label them," said Atkinson Patch. "Then think in departments.

Group similar items in one place, put them in a container and call it a department. For example, the extension cords go in the electrical department. Hammers go in the tool department. Needles and thread go in the sewing department."

As you sort, you might find multiples. "Once I had a client who started organizing and discovered that she had 12 staplers because when she couldn't find one she would go out and buy another one," said Susan Unger, an organizer and owner of Clutter SOS in Vienna.

Work gradually until a home or space is organized. "Do it in small, manageable chunks," said Jody Al-Saigh, owner of Picture Perfect Organizing in Arlington. "Perhaps 15 or 20 minutes per day and perhaps one day out of the week. Make manageable goals that you can achieve because you are going to get frustrated if you don't. If you can't do a whole room in one day, maybe do a drawer one day and another one the next day until the room is finished."

"When you buy something, you need to be thinking first about where it is going to go in your home. If an item doesn't have a home, it should not be coming into your home."
— Jody Al-Saigh, Arlington

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PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL/THE CONNECTION

Some shelving and clean bins transform a basement.



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL/THE CONNECTION

Organizer Margaret Buco of Potomac, Md. set up a mail filing system for Dan Davis of Silver Spring, Md. "I had him place a trash bag in the [foyer] of his house, so when he brings in his mail, his junk mail goes directly in the bag before the mail goes in the house."

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Organized in a New Year

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Organizers say resist the urge to purchase organizing tools until you assess your needs. "First start by using things you already own before buying new things," said Buco.

Drawer dividers, non-slip hangers and clear plastic containers are among organizers' top weapons in the battle against chaos.

"[One] client had a lot of necklaces and bracelets that she never wore because they were in a drawer and she couldn't see them," said Unger. "I found these great Lucite jewelry hangers that we attached to her closet, and now she sees them and wears them all the time."

"One main organizational problem is a lot of junk drawers," said Atkinson Patch. "Everybody has them. They hold everything from bills to throat lozenges. You're allowed to have one junk drawer in your house. Put everything else in the proper place."

Another source of clutter is unsorted mail. "Stand next to the trashcan and go through the mail when you first get it," said Atkinson Patch. "Throw out or recycle things you know you don't want or need. Ask yourself, 'Do I have money to give to this charity right now?' If the answer is no, throw it in the trash. You don't need to save these things. You can go online to give to charity and order from catalogs."

To help eliminate excess paper, scan documents and store them electronically whenever possible. "For important things like passports and birth certificates get a fireproof box so you can keep them safe and access them quickly," said Bucco.

With the proper organizational gadgets, crowded closets become more spacious. "One way to make



Eileen LaGreca, an organizer based in Fairfax, says that once you clear out a closet, visualize how the space will be used before re-stocking it.

more room in closets [is to buy] hangers with several clips so you can hang multiple clothing items on one hanger and use your lateral space more efficiently," said Reinholdt. "You can piggyback your hangers and hang maybe four

or five things in the same space. I am also big on using over-the-door shoe pockets for not only shoes but for storing all kinds of things like scarves, jewelry [and] small items like socks and underwear."

When organizing a child's space, techniques such as labeling containers with pictures instead of words makes it easier for young children to put belongings in the proper space. "If there is a bin for blocks, put a picture of blocks on the front," said Buco. "Keep like items together. Dolls with dolls, crayons with crayons."

Buco organized the playroom in her grandchildren's Centreville home using the same tools that she uses for adult spaces. "What is important for children is that they can see everything clearly and that everything is in arms reach," she said.

Take inventory of children's spaces quarterly. "Go through playrooms and children's bedrooms four times each year to organize and assess toys and clothing," said Buco.

Once a home is tidy and every-



Alexandria-based organizer Sally Reinholdt says that with the proper organizational gadgets, she can make crowded closets seem more spacious

thing is in its proper place, what is the secret for keeping it that way? Experts say it takes discipline. "There is a maintenance routine where for 10 minutes every day you go around your house and put things back where they belong," said LaGreca.

The "one in, one out" rule is golden in the world of organiza-

tion. "If you're buying something new, that might mean getting rid of something else to make room for it," said Al-Saigh. "When you buy something, you need to be thinking first about where it is going to go in your home. If an item doesn't have a home, it should not be coming into your home."

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A little organization makes these jewelry pieces and handbags easy to find.

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