

— get — ORGANIZED

Look beyond the basic bin for these tried-and-true storage solutions and home organization tips

By Tina Smithers Peckham

This somewhat quiet post-winter period serves as a prime opportunity to get our lives back on track following the unavoidable stress that comes with another holiday season here on the First Coast. One of the first steps to easing some of that tension of everyday life? A little good old-fashioned spring cleaning — but trust us when we say, there is so much more to the old “spring cleaning” adage than simply breaking out your broom and bevy of heavy-duty trash bags. We’re talking the home organization variety, i.e., *a place for everything and everything in its place*.

While decluttering and organizing one’s surroundings can feel like a daunting chore — many homes *do* contain a lifetime of belongings, after all — the end result is almost always a more peaceful state of mind. From tips on purging your closet to statement storage that goes beyond boring plastic bins (though we admit, sometimes those totes do come in handy!), read on for a few of our favorite golden rules when it comes to organizing your living space.



Be Realistic and Start Small

The cold, hard truth: Rome wasn’t built in a day, and you won’t have the entire house decluttered and delightfully organized within 24 hours... or even 48. There’s paperwork to file, clothing and accessories to sort, expired pantry items to purge, linens to fold, and let’s not even talk about that junk drawer you’ve been avoiding for the better part of five years. So, pick one space or room in your home — heck, it can even be as small as a single office drawer — and hop to it, first getting rid of belongings you never use, and then putting items away in their proper places.

No, the magic won’t happen overnight, but start small and work your way up to more time-consuming tasks such as sorting that walk-in closet full of winter clothes and outdated trends you haven’t worn since 2012 — and we promise, you’ll start to feel more on top of your disarray in no time.

Another Person’s Treasure (But No Longer Yours)

Let it go. We repeat, *let it go* (to the tune of *Frozen*, optional). You can get all KonMari and purge the items that do not bring you joy, as suggested in Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* — or simply get rid of any things you haven’t used or thought about in the past several years.

That chic 1960s-era coat you’ve never worn (because, um, it’s Florida) could be thoroughly enjoyed by someone else in a cooler climate. Same goes for that 10-year-old pair of UGG boots that do little more than collect dust. Because while you think you may want these items “someday,” chances are, “someday” will never arrive if it hasn’t already... and that’s okay! If it’s broken, stained or worn out, toss it. If it’s a sentimental memento that you truly don’t think you’ll miss, say your good-byes. Less stuff is far easier to keep organized, and you’ll feel better mentally when you don’t have to sift through it to find what you need.

Also, look beyond small knick-knacks when downsizing. Scour your home for any large or oversized pieces you no longer use or don’t really like all that well. The accent table in the corner that serves zero purpose, the tufted bench that hardly matches the updated decor, the bulky exercise bike you can’t bring yourself to sit on let alone ride — these items can certainly go, freeing up some space in your home *and* your head.

As far as what to do with your stuff when you’re through with it? If it’s in good condition, and you don’t wish to resell or recycle it, consider homeless shelters, women’s centers or other local organizations before the typical thrift store or Goodwill go-to, which are often overwhelmed with items, especially clothing. Foster Closet, Hubbard House and City Rescue Mission are just a few community resources that help those in need.



Something as simple as a shoebox wrapped in pretty paper, an unused mason jar, beloved coffee mug or glass bowl, a vintage breakfast tray, or even a series of mesh magazine holders can hold odds and ends.

Be Container and Storage Smart

When thinking actual storage solutions, don't jump the gun and buy a bunch of baskets. Grab a tape measure, and identify storage spaces first so you have a place to put all the items that need a home — this way, you'll be able to find right-sized containers, baskets, boxes and bins that will fit nicely. Seeing as many homes in Florida are lacking in this department as far as basements go, feel free to think outside the box (pun intended) and utilize space under your bed or find other spots that may be out of the general line of sight. Not only that, but consider small pieces of furniture for bathroom, guest room or office storage — a small bookcase, metal rolling cart or trio of drawers on wheels can work great for storing beauty products, office supplies and linens while also serving as eye candy with a pretty vase of flowers perched on top. The best part? No need for power tools or precious time spent installing custom shelves.

If you need to maximize the area, consider square containers, as their round counterparts are less space-efficient. Another way to conserve space is to place smaller vessels inside larger ones (i.e. for smaller items like paperclips, rubber bands, pens and pencils, etc.) and seek out decorative nesters (stackable containers), which can be a stylish and practical solution.

Also take into account the material of your storage units — boring as they be, plastic bins with lids can be best for long-term storage or seasonal items, while clear glass containers are ideal for food, spices and pantry goods. And if you're placing certain items in rustic wooden boxes or crates, consider lining them with fabric. This both protects your belongings and keeps things looking a little more polished.

Another way to keep your clutter looking as impeccable as possible? Opt for lids where it counts, beyond the aforementioned Christmas decorations and winter scarves. For instance, rather than keeping semi-important paperwork like mail, receipts and coupons stuffed in a drawer, get yourself a charming (in)box with a lid — like the cute ones you spy at those big-chain craft stores — and sift through the papers once a week or so. If company swings by, simply pop on the lid to conceal the mess inside.

Repurpose and Reuse

Organized storage is all about categorizing similar items and storing them in a manner that not only looks visually appealing but is easily accessible. If you prefer not to purchase a paycheck's worth of fancy wicker baskets and farmhouse-chic wooden boxes, consider repurposing some of your existing items as creative storage solutions.

Something as simple as a shoebox wrapped in pretty paper, an unused mason jar, beloved coffee mug or glass bowl, a vintage breakfast tray, or even a series of mesh magazine holders (labeled, of course, but more on that later) can hold odds and ends. As for jewelry, there's nothing worse than a mess of tangled necklaces and stray earrings without a match — store costume jewelry in containers with natural dividers such as an egg rack, ice cube tray or muffin tin, all of which can fit perfectly in a drawer. Sure, it might sound strange to use kitchen essentials for your accessories, but you could always spruce 'em up by adding paint or a lining of fun fabric.

As for any old furniture you're not quite ready to part with (see previous section), you can actually repurpose that, too! An antique bookcase can be moved to a closet to store and display shoes and handbags, while a little-used armoire could work in the kitchen to keep bulky appliances, cookbooks or non-perishables.



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Put a Label on It

Label, label and then label some more! When it comes to labeling your bins, boxes and files, the possibilities are endless... and they can be oh-so pretty and fun to make. Labels are crucial to helping maintain any sort of organizational system and keep you and other members of your household from blindly filing things away in the incorrect spots (the horror!).

Ready to mark your territory, so to speak? Spring for a traditional label maker, order personalized custom-made labels on Etsy, opt for handwritten chalkboard labels, or get creative with pretty tags or Japanese washi masking tape.

If you'd like to take it one step further, alphabetize your containers, color code tags or files, or even create a list of contents and attach it to your bin so you know precisely what's inside — ideal for organizing art or office supplies.



Stick With It (or Tweak As Needed!)

Your hard work will only truly pay off if you get in the habit of returning things to their rightful place almost as soon as you're finished using them. Otherwise, you're liable to have to conquer your clutter all over again, and nobody wants that.

But if a certain system or placement isn't working, you can always alter it. For instance, will sliding drawers work better for toiletries and hair appliances than hard-to-reach boxes? Swap 'em out! Would glass canisters be better than tiny baskets for your bags of flavored coffee beans and tea sachets? Switch it up! The beauty in home organization is that it's always changing as our lives, needs and abundance of things inevitably evolve. ☾