

organize today!

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

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Organizing to Help the Environment

Being organized has great *personal* benefits. You can easily find things, save time and money, and become incredibly productive.

Getting organized can have great *environmental* benefits as well. By following the three Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), you'll use fewer natural resources, discover new uses for old things, and find fresh homes for your castoffs.

Sounds great, right? But how to get started? This issue of *Organize Today* will help you make smart purchase decisions, minimize waste, and make Mother Earth very happy.

First step: reduce

One of the great benefits to living an organized life is the positive impact you can have on our environment. When you're organized, you can buy less stuff (reduce), you can think of creative ways to reinvent old items (reuse), and you can thoughtfully dispose of your discards (recycle). Follow these tips to tackle the first "R." You'll earn key benefits like saving money, time, and natural resources, as well as feeling less cluttered and stressed at home and work.

Think before you buy. Studies show that 80 percent of what we use comes from 20 percent of what we own. That means that 80 percent of the things in our homes are rarely or never used. Next time, before you buy, think about the time you'll spend in cleaning, storing, and maintaining that item after you bring it home. If you must buy, establish a "new item in, old item out" system where some purging takes place before shopping, meaning less clutter in your home.

Reduce waste at the office. Try to generate less paper by printing less and saving more to electronic storage, such as your computer or a CD-ROM. Send an e-mail rather than a printed memo or letter. Think before you hit "print" and you'll have less paper to deal with on your desk.

Purchase items that have less packaging. Buy concentrates, such as orange juice and laundry detergent. Avoid single-serving products and buy in bulk instead. Reuse paper or plastic shopping bags or bring your own sturdy cloth tote, thus reducing a messy pile of bags littering your home.



Reduce travel toxins. Opt for walking, biking, or taking the bus or subway over driving a car. Try to combine trips when running errands to save time, money, and natural resources.

Second step: reuse

Finding creative new uses for your things is not only environmentally friendly, it's fun and allows you to stay organized!

Make old furniture new again. A can of colorful spray paint can liven up an old picture frame. A coat of glossy paint can transform an old dresser into something new and fabulous.

Hold a clothing swap with friends. Invite some pals to a clothing exchange party. Have each person bring 5-10 items she no longer wears, and swap them over music and hors d'oeuvres. Everyone leaves with a free new wardrobe! Send the leftovers to a local charity.

Shop smart. When you need something, consider buying it used at a secondhand store. You can find everything from upscale clothing to furniture, books, building supplies, and more.

Rotate toys. If you have kids, send Barbie on a vacation for a while, let the stuffed animals hibernate, and let some games take a time-out. Bring those toys out a few months later and they'll seem like new.



Find new uses for disposable items. Visit www.makestuff.com for fun projects to make with reused materials, such as old film canisters, CD jewel cases, and baby food jars.

Create your own organizing containers. Rather than spend tons of money on plastic organizing bins, drawer dividers, and wicker baskets, reinvent common household items: The small boxes that your checks come in make great drawer dividers. Oatmeal boxes nicely hold art supplies like crayons and pencils. An ice cube tray neatly divides earrings or holds desk supplies like paper clips and tacks. Look around your home and see what inspires you!

Decluttering 101: quick tips to pare down

Take some time to declutter your home. In the process, you'll be able to reduce, reuse, and recycle! To start, divide a room into sections. Pick one section (like a drawer or cupboard) and begin. Ask whether you consider each item beautiful, useful, or loved. If not, you can probably **recycle** by giving it to someone else. Or you may be able to **reuse** an item in a different way by thinking creatively. If you're still not sure if you should get rid of an item, ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen if I toss this?" The answer may help give you the power to discard the clutter. If you're having a hard time letting go of the clutter, enlist the help of a friend or professional organizer to offer an objective viewpoint.

To **reduce** future clutter, prevent it from accumulating in the first place. Don't give clutter a chance to form. As you've probably experienced, once clutter occupies a space, it has a way of multiplying. Always remember to emphasize quality over quantity. In other words, it's not important to have a lot of things, many of which you never use. It's more beneficial to have fewer things, all of which you use and/or enjoy. Pare down and you'll soon reap the benefits of a clutter-free life: more energy, happier relationships, a well-organized home or office, new opportunities, a better outlook on life, and less-full landfills.

Last step: recycle

Holding onto things “just in case” is not enough reason to keep them. By letting go, you’ll find that most of the time you’ll never need those things again, and you’ll enjoy the freedom of uncluttered, open spaces. But throwing things out is bad for the environment, so find ways to recycle clothing, household items, and much more.

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

- **Goodwill** accepts furniture, cars, clothing, books, toys, and more. Visit locator.goodwill.org to find a location near you.
- **Disabled Vietnam Veterans** accepts clothing, housewares, and some furniture. Neighborhood pickups available in some areas. Visit www.vva.org.
- **Lupus Foundation** accepts clothing, housewares, and some furniture. Neighborhood pickups available in some areas. Visit www.lupus.org and click on “chapter locator.”
- **Salvation Army** accepts clothing and housewares. Visit www.satruck.com to schedule a pickup.
- **Epilepsy Foundation** accepts most household items (clothing, shoes, bedding items, housewares, toys, games, tools, and small appliances) and will often pick up at your home. Visit www.epilepsy-foundation.org.

BUSINESS CLOTHING



- Many **local organizations** provide low-income women with gently used clothing suitable for interviews and the workplace. One to try is **Dress for Success**. Visit www.dressforsuccess.org. **The Women’s Alliance** has over 20 drop-off sites across the country. Visit www.thewomensalliance.org.

EYE GLASSES

- **LensCrafters** accepts used eye glasses. Visit www.lenscrafters.com for a location near you. Local Lions Clubs also accept glasses.

CARS

- **Donateacar.com** or **donate-car-for-charity.com** accept used cars. There are also many local charities that accept vehicles.

CELL PHONES

- Many cell phone retailers offer free recycling of all brands of unwanted cell phones and accessories. Drop off your cell phones at **AT&T Wireless, Sprint, and Verizon Wireless stores**.
- **Best Buy** provides free and easy cell phone recycling.
- **Staples** office supply stores offer free recycling services for used cell phones.
- Many **local schools** accept cell phones as a fundraiser.



ART SUPPLIES

- Try your local **Parks and Recreation Department** and **local elementary schools** to donate anything that could be used for art projects for children. Also try your **local museums**.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES FOR RECYCLING

- **Greenguardian** is a great place to learn how to reduce garbage and increase recycling. It also has a nice kids’ section. Visit www.greenguardian.com.
- **www.americarecyclesday.org** shares why recycling is important, how recycling works, and recycling tips.
- **www.recycleworks.org** lists fun ways to reuse objects that you would otherwise recycle or throw away. Includes art projects, gift ideas, home organization, science projects, and more for kids and adults.



Reduce unwanted mail with 5 simple steps

1. **Limit unwanted mailbox advertising:**

Greatly reduce advertising mail (and save some trees) by registering with the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service. Call 212-768-7277 or visit www.dmaconsumers.org.

2. **Opt out of unsolicited credit card offers:**

The nation's four major credit bureaus will help you get off lists for pre-approved credit card offers by simply calling 1-888-5-OPTOUT. You'll need to provide your social security number, full name, address, and telephone number.

3. **Use caution when giving out your contact information:**

Nearly every time you send in a product warranty card or enter a contest, your data will be used to send you more paper! These

companies may in turn sell or share your information with other companies. Use caution. And if you provide your contact information, request that the company not share or sell it.

4. **Cancel subscriptions:** Take the pressure off yourself by canceling any magazine subscriptions that you never seem to get around to reading anyway. Same with the newspaper.



5. **Keep junk mail at bay in your home and office:** Immediately after daily retrieval, sort mail while standing over your recycling bin. Toss with reckless abandon (be sure to shred things like credit card offers) so junk mail doesn't create piles of, well, junk in your home or office.

Simplify with a non-toxic cleaning routine

You can save time, money, and natural resources by choosing environmentally friendly cleaning methods for your home. **A microfiber cloth** (available at any discount or grocery store) will do a swell job of removing dust from all hard surfaces, eliminating a need for those pricey dusting sprays and non-recyclable paper towels. Let your clothes dryer take a rest, and opt instead for **line-drying** when the weather is nice, saving electricity and giving your clothes a shot of fresh-smelling, deodorizing sunshine. Instead of buying air fresheners, **open some windows** and **add plants** which absorb chemicals and odors. And **clear out clutter** — it just gathers dust and makes cleaning more time-consuming.



Most cleaning products that you purchase at the store are toxic. Look at the labels on bottles such as toilet bowl cleaner, bathroom disinfectant, and furniture polish. You'll see words like *Poison*, *Danger*, *Warning*, and *Caution*. If you'd rather not bring those chemicals into your home, it's easy and inexpensive to create your own **homemade, non-toxic cleaning products**. Simple combinations of baking soda, vinegar, borax, and essential oils make a variety of cleaners, which can be used on mirrors, windows, toilets, sinks, floors, and more, are effective, cheap, and safe.

Toilet Cleaner: Sprinkle 1/4 cup borax (available in a box in the cleaning aisle of your grocery store) or baking soda and a few drops of essential oil (eucalyptus or tea tree oil are antiseptic) into the toilet, scrub, let sit for a few minutes, scrub again, and flush.

Floor Cleaner: In a squirt bottle, create a 50/50 mix of white vinegar and water, add a few drops of essential oil (peppermint or lavender are nice), squirt cleaner onto floor, and mop up.

Glass Cleaner: Club soda in a squirt bottle works well, as does an equal mixture of water and vinegar. Wipe down with a lint-free cloth or crumpled newspapers.

Tub and Sink Cleaner: Shake some baking soda mixed with a few drops of essential oil (orange or lime smell fresh) into sink or tub, wipe with damp sponge, rinse.

Wood furniture polish: Add some olive oil and a few drops of vinegar on a cloth and rub in.

By creating your own cleaning products, you'll keep your home, family, and environment safe. (Use common sense caution — even though these cleaning products are gentle, it's best to keep borax and essential oils out of young children's reach.) You'll never have to worry about harmful fumes or chemicals with these great cleaners. And you'll save lots of cupboard space, money, and time by simplifying your cleaning routine.

A good resource for more non-toxic, inexpensive household cleaning recipes is the book *Clean House, Clean Planet* by Karen Logan.