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Reclaim that JUNK DRAWER

Use this expert advice to tackle your home's junkiest spots

BY KATE PARHAM FOR USA TODAY

W

WE ALL HAVE JUNK. And we've all found places to stash it. But out of sight does not mean out of mind. With advice from two organizing aficionados, you can clear the clutter, once and for all.

THINKSTOCKPHOTOS

THE EXPERTS

DEB LEE is a certified professional organizer and recent winner of the National Association of Professional Organizers' Washington, D.C.-area Professional Organizer of the Year award.

SALLIE FELTON is the author of the new book *If I'm So Smart Why Can't I Get Rid of this Clutter?*

THE PROCESS

When you're ready to declutter an area in your home, start with these two steps.

1

Remove all contents from the problem area. Determine what you want to store in the space and get rid of anything that doesn't belong. If an item is broken, leaking, stained, expired, or otherwise unusable, throw it away.

2

Clean the problem area. Vacuum, dust, wipe down, bleach—whatever it takes.

5 DECLUTTER YOUR HOME'S PROBLEM AREAS

Junk drawer in the kitchen

WHAT'S IN THERE Chopsticks from the Chinese takeout restaurant, keys to your old bachelor pad, 156 pens—many with no ink.

SOLUTION “The junk drawer isn’t a junky drawer,” Lee explains. “It’s a place for keeping a variety of items in one location.”

Start by identifying the best location for the junk drawer, ensuring the inside of the drawer is big enough to suit your needs, Felton says.

Then, use the two-step process to purge and clean the area. Use expandable drawer organizers to group similar items. And keep everything in plain sight, so you don’t have to go digging for what you need.

KEEP IT CLEAN “Adding a label to each section will help you to not only find what you want, but also put it back in the right place when you’re done,” Lee says. Go through your junk drawer every week to make sure it doesn’t turn to actual junk.



Under the sink

WHAT'S IN THERE Stacks of paper towels, cleaning supplies leaking on the floor, dust bunnies, wads of plastic bags shoved into corners.

SOLUTION After completing the two-step process, “sort, purge, and categorize your like items (cleaning supplies, hair products, etc.) and store them together,” suggests Lee. “That way, you’ll know exactly what you have and can avoid buying duplicates because you can’t find what you’re looking for.”

Felton recommends using a rubber dishpan to store garbage bags, dishwasher detergent, liquid soaps, and extra scrub pads and cloths. The bottom of a shoebox makes a great container for storing silver or copper polish and old toothbrushes, best kept in a glass jar, for polishing. Lee prefers using pullout baskets or drawer systems to keep like items together.

KEEP IT CLEAN Every month or so, take an inventory of your products and create a shopping list, Lee says. If you find something you don’t use anymore, give it to a friend or donate it.

TOP AND BOTTOM: ISTOCKPHOTO

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Linen closet

WHAT'S IN THERE Mismatched sheets and towels, extra comforters, old newspapers and magazines, bins stuffed with expired toiletries, a decades-old bottle of Advil.

SOLUTION After completing the two-step process, "start by installing shelf liners and dividers to keep your sheets and towels from falling over once you've folded them," Lee says.

Use labels to keep track of things. "I (use) a black marker and label TFL for twin flat," Felton says. "Twin fitted equals TFT, QFL and QFT for queen, and so on to make the search much easier."

In a linen closet, layout is important. Felton suggests storing heavy, bulky items on the bottom shelf or the floor, along with items that don't get used regularly. If you don't have enough space, consider investing in containers that can live in a bedroom closet or under the bed. Or, buy a nice trunk for extra storage.

"Some people use this area to house medical supplies," Felton says. "If you do, put them on the very top shelf, in a clean see-through container so children cannot get to them."

KEEP IT CLEAN Routinely go through the closet, combining duplicates when possible and purging anything expired, damaged, or worn.

Bedside table or nightstand

WHAT'S IN THERE The stack of books you've been meaning to read, wadded-up tissues, three earplugs, dried-up pens, five sets of reading glasses, leaky lotions.

SOLUTION Your bedroom is your sanctuary. Stop letting papers, bills, receipts, and the like take up residence on your nightstand. Adopt a less-is-more attitude.

Felton suggests putting a sheet over the bed and dumping the contents of your nightstand onto it. Determine what you want to store and keep it minimal. Only the book you're currently reading, an alarm clock, and a few basic products

you use at night should make the cut.

If you're in the habit of taking off your jewelry once you're in bed, Lee suggests using a decorative bowl or stand. If you keep your wallet and keys there, use a tray or a charging valet to keep it neat. "Remember, this is what you wake up to each morning," Lee says. "You want a peaceful, uncluttered start to your day."

KEEP IT CLEAN Every week, go through all the things on your nightstand and remove items that don't live there. "Doing this often will ensure that you don't end up with piles and piles of stuff to go through," Lee says.



Pantry

WHAT'S IN THERE Canned soup from 1982, a dozen bags of pasta, extra dishes (likely with nicks and dings), four half-eaten bags of chips.

SOLUTION After completing the two-step process, place items that will expire soon in front. Those with a longer shelf life should be relegated to the back, suggests Lee.

"The same goes for frequently used items," Lee says. "You want to see them easily and not pull the whole pantry apart to find them." Use baskets and airtight containers to store food items, and add labels so you recognize everything.

Make good use of the space at hand by storing items on the inside of your pantry door using a door or wall system with baskets.

KEEP IT CLEAN "Every couple of months, check your expiration dates and discard anything that has expired, even if you spent a lot of money on it," says Lee, who also suggests keeping a shopping list on the outside of the pantry door.

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