

As seen in the "Ask the Organizing Expert" Column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings

Choosing "Homes"

Question: I can't find a thing in my house! There are random things in random places. It completely lacks order. Please help!

It sounds like your home could use some "homes" – that's code for what your mother probably called "a place for everything and everything in its place." In this situation, Mom was right. The most important thing you can do to maintain order in any space is have a chosen location, or "home," for every item. Why so important? "Homes" tell you where to find something (The scissors are in the drawer.); where to return something (Put these scissors back in the drawer.); aid in quick clean up (Let's tidy up your toys in 5 minutes.); eliminate clutter piles (Often a collection of "homeless" items.); reduce needless spending (Rats! I just bought a white blouse, but I already had three!); and finally, are good for your health (How quickly does your blood pressure rise when you can't find your keys?). Consider these concepts for establishing good "homes:"

Zone Out: Grocery stores use zones (frozen foods here, produce there); and kindergartens use zones (blocks on the shelf, paints in the bucket); and your home can benefit from them, too. Choose large zones and then zones within zones. For example – a garage might be the general zone for all things outdoor-related. Within the garage, you might have a zone for car care, sports equipment and gardening. Within the sports zone, you might further divide your golf, ski and football gear. Good zoning is the cornerstone of setting up "homes."

Point of Use: This one is easy - place objects where they are used. Your coffee mugs live near the espresso machine; your paper is with the printer. A gourmet chef, operating in a small space with all his tools in arm's reach, is the epitome of this concept.

Frequency of Use: No doubt some objects get more use than others. Make sure the oft used items get the most convenient and easy-to-access locations. Infrequently used items get booted to less handy spaces. Example – current household files are in the home office, whereas old taxes can be archived in the closet.

Location, Location, Location: Evaluate spaces much like you would real estate, some areas are more prime than others. An eye-level kitchen cabinet, for example, is prime real estate. But that cupboard above the fridge, or that tricky one in the corner, is decidedly less prime. Make sure items placed in prime locations are worthy of their positioning.

Baskets, Boxes and Bins, oh My: When lots of things share the same "home," divide and conquer with baskets and bins. Keep like things with like. Paints, pastels and pencils, for instance, can enjoy the same shelf in an art studio, but be neatly separated in clearly labeled baskets.

Out of Sight Out of Mind: Have you ever tucked something away, only to forget where you put it? For items that elude a logical "home," ask yourself: "Where would I look for this?" An answer will almost always emerge. Put it there.

Odd Man Out: No sooner will you establish a house full of logical "homes," then you'll come across something that simply doesn't fit. Perhaps your turkey roaster refuses to nest with the other bake ware. By all means, break the rules and find a next-best place. Maybe it's the top shelf of a closet or even in the garage. Flexibility is key!

On the Go: Items still in motion – incoming and outgoing mail, library books, school backpacks – need a "home," too. Choose a staging area, usually near the backdoor, to corral these clutter hogs.

Few concepts in the pursuit of order are more important than establishing good "homes." Apply this concept to your wallet, the car, throughout the house, or even an entire office building. You can bet efficient hospitals and factories make good use of "homes." If you have trouble finding things, tend to buy duplicates, or have random piles lying about, perhaps you would benefit from some "homes." Give it a try. Mom would be proud!

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