



Lifestyle

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Get Organized: Eliminate the clutter in your home office

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There are two areas of the home more prone to clutter -- the garage and the home office -- and the latter often causes more headaches.

If the time has come to snap out of the clutter coma you've been living in, a few simple moves will help you take control of your home office.

Making your office a priority and dedicating time to get it organized is one of the best gifts you can give yourself. Everyone is busy; you need to "make" the time to do this for you.

Here are some starting points:

- Decide what purpose your home office will serve. The clearer you are on the purpose, the easier it will be to reach your desired outcome.
- Remove anything from the office that no longer serves the purpose.
- Determine if your office is configured so you can perform the actions you've intended. If the answer is no, look at reconfiguring the space.
- A coat of paint in a color you love is an inexpensive way to make a fresh new change. It can even inspire you to want to be in your office more.
- Clear off your work surface or desk, putting back only those things you use regularly or projects you're working on. The rest needs to be relocated. A desk does not need to be free of paperwork, but the more that is on your work area, the more distracting it will be.

It's practically impossible to organize an office without the purchase of at least a few organizing products to help control the clutter. Here are some of my favorite products ideas that you can use in your office.

Filing box -- Create a Daily Action Center with the help of a stylish filing box or portable tote, some hanging files and Smead Viewables or M.O. Filing Tabs.

The action center is the place to keep papers and information you need access to on a daily basis, but don't want to leave piled on your desk or the kitchen counter.

Some categories of information you may want to store here: To do or needs action, pending or follow-up, coupons, menus, events (directions, invitations, tickets), bills to pay, directories, children's schedules, current projects.

Available at organize.com, containerstore.com. Similar products at Staples, Crate & Barrel, Target and Storables.

Smead Viewables and M.O. Filing Tabs -- Simply the best filing/labeling product on the market. The 3D tab lets you see your information from the front, top and back. Use these in your filing cabinet, filing box or action center.

Smead Viewables are available at Staples and Office Depot. M.O. Filing Tabs available at yourmo.com.

Pendaflex PileSmart binder label clips -- These binder clips let you pile documents on your desk and find them again at a glance. The clips keep your documents together and allow you to label them. They come in a variety of colors to help you color-code your papers.

Available at Staples, Office Max, Office Depot.

Magazine files -- These can be used for much more than storing magazines. Use them in your kitchen to store small phone directories, say from church or your child's school. Use them in your office to store extra supplies, such as file folders, computer labels, computer photo paper packages, large envelopes, sheet protectors, etc.

Storing these items vertically instead of horizontally allows quicker, easier access. Be sure to turn the magazine file with the material inside facing the wall, so that you see the finished edge. This will give you a nice clean look should you need to store these on open shelves.

Product pictured is available at The Container Store. Similar magazine files at Ikea, Target, Crate & Barrel, any office supply store or online at organize.com and levenger.com.

Wall sorter -- A great tool for getting the piles off your desk, but still having your projects visible.

Available at The Container Store and organize.com. Similar units at Ikea, Storables and office supply stores.

On Line Organizer Book -- Too many passwords to remember? Too many sticky notes on your computer monitor with passwords? Don't like storing them on your computer? The answer is the On Line Organizer Book, which lets you track the date the account was opened, company name and URL, user name and password, renewal date, online banking and other account numbers.

Have an extra empty address book lying around? You could use it to store password information as well.

Organizer Book available at organize.com.

Storage for instruction manuals and warranties -- If you suddenly needed the instruction manual to your dryer that is not drying your clothes, would you know where to find it?

It's easiest to store all of these documents in one location, and there are many options, such as in a filing cabinet, portable filing tote box, three-ring binder with sheet protectors or even a box. There also are products designed to store and organize these documents, such as the Warranty & Instruction Manual Organizer.

A personal favorite is a portable filing tote box. That way, these documents won't take up space in your filing cabinet. You can divide the materials by type; such as: large appliances, small appliances, electronics, children's toys, tools, sporting equipment, yard equipment, furniture, etc.

Write the date of purchase on the manual or warranty. Even better, attach your receipt in case you need proof of purchase.

Warranty & Instruction Manual Organizer available at organize.com.

Just one notebook -- Too many notepads? Can't find your notes? Try using one notepad or journal book instead of multiple books for the notes you must always have close at hand. It can be helpful to break your notepad or journal book into sections -- calls to make, things to do, kid stuff, projects, shopping lists, etc.

Use Avery Write-On Tabs to divide your notebook or journal. They are the perfect solution.

Notebooks or journal books with pages that you can take out and put back in are the perfect solution. You can move paper from one section to another or add more paper into a certain section.

I like both the Circa from Levenson and Rolla from Staples. Each is available in a variety of sizes, colors and covers to suit every need and budget. You can buy refill paper as well as a desk punch to add paper.

Available at levenger.com and staples.com.

Cord control -- Are the cords in your office out of control? Take control with 3M's Cord Bundler and Adhesive Cord Clips.

Use the cord clips to affix to the top, side or back of your desk to keep the cords in place. For cords that are extra-long, wind them up and affix them to the wall or the back of your desk using one of the cord bundlers.

Use a label maker or masking tape to label each cord -- it will make it much easier to find what you're looking for and make sure you don't accidentally unplug something that shouldn't be unplugged.

Available at The Container Store, Target and hardware stores.

Laura Leist is president and founder of locally-based Eliminate Chaos LLC. Her latest book is "Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life" (Sasquatch, 212 pages, \$19.95), available at bookstores or on her Web site, eliminatechaos.com. She can be reached at laura@eliminatechaos.com.