

Your First Organization Victory - The Pantry

As a professional organizer, I enjoy watching organization shows on television. Isn't it amazing that they can organize a room or even a home in less than an hour?! Of course, if you've ever tried it yourself, without the "magic" of television and unlimited resources, you know that it takes more than that to organize a home. In fact, you may cause more of a problem if you start something big, like organizing your entire home, which you can not finish. Therefore, the key to organizing your home is to tackle it one space at a time. So if you want to get started, I would recommend the following practical steps to fix one potential problem area in your home – the pantry.

Why start with your pantry? In general, pantries make a great first-time organizing project, something you can accomplish within a couple of hours with minimal, if any cost. Plus, an organized pantry can minimize dinner preparation stress, time and cost. If you are willing to invest two or three hours to organize your pantry, you will reap the benefits every time you prepare a meal. Here are the easy steps for setting up your dream pantry:

First, start by:

- Taking everything out of the pantry and placing like items together in an area close by.
- Sort through each pile looking for anything that may be expired and toss it.
- Next, is there anything in your piles that you haven't been using? Set these items aside which can later be donated to a charity of your choice (e.g.: food pantries or other assistance agencies).
- Once everything is out, take time to wipe the shelves clean.

Now you are ready to place things back, not just anywhere, but in an appropriate spot. To do this, consider these questions when placing your items back in the pantry:

- "What do I reach for most often?"
- "What do I use the least?"
- "Which pile is the largest?"

Once you have answered these questions, you want to put the items you use the most often in a location that is easy to reach and at eye level. You also need to consider space needed for the larger piles. I recommend placing those items on the shelves first so as to have enough room for them. Last, place the least used items on the upper or lower shelves.

Another thing to consider when placing your items back in the pantry is what should go together.

- Baking items like flour, sugar, baking soda should all go on one shelf or section.
- Canned and boxed items such as rice, pasta, beans placed on one shelf makes dinner planning much easier... just look on that shelf to see what is available for dinner.
- Another shelf might include all breakfast items like cereal, oatmeal, breakfast bars.
- If you have a large enough pantry to store small appliances, one shelf could be allotted to these.

Once everything is back in the pantry, step back and take a look. Do you like the feel of your new and organized pantry? Are these items easy for you to see and locate? If not, then you may need to consider purchasing a few things to help out. Some ideas would be:

- A storage rack for canned goods. These can be purchased at a low cost and don't take up much space. They also allow you to see what you have and what you need to restock.
- Wire baskets that attach underneath a shelf help use up the vertical space which is often not used.
- "Lazy Susans" help accommodate items for an easier reach. These are perfect for those hard to reach corners and are great for oils, vinegars, sauces, etc.
- Basket's or plastic bins work great for corralling boxed or bagged items. When someone wants a specific bag of chips, the whole basket can be brought down, and items won't get lost at the back of the shelf.
- Loose items like cereal, crackers, pasta, grains or beans may need to have individual containers to insure they stay fresh and bug free (don't forget to label).
- Purchasing snacks and placing them in snack size bags allows for a quick grab when packing for lunches or curbing those hunger pangs. Having them ready to go in a basket is not only handy, but limits the amount eaten in one setting and when it is getting low, you know it is time to shop.

Gaining control over your food storage prevents you from overbuying and wasting. Most importantly, order in your pantry gives you control, eases planning of meals and helps you prepare dinner on time, helping you amidst your already busy and hectic schedule.

To make your pantry even more effective, use a menu calendar and shopping list to plan meals and ensure that you get everything you need at the supermarket. Having a menu planned out ahead of time, allows you to "shop" your pantry before going to the grocery store; therefore saving you money on unwanted items. If you take the time to update your shopping list when an item is used up, you will minimize your trips to the store.

By: Bryn Shoffstall
Clutter-Flies
Professional Organization
www.clutterflies.org

Address This Mess
Las Cruces Sun News
February 2009