

Reclaiming One Room at a Time

Professional advice for removing the clutter and getting organized



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There’s nothing like that first warm day of spring. Throwing open all your windows to let the fresh air in, you realize the change of season is more than a harbinger of warmer days to come. It also means it’s spring-cleaning season - yes, that spirit of birth and renewal applies to your home as well, and there’s no better time to get your living space freshened up.

Organization and interior decoration pros, and Accredited Staging® Professionals, Bernadette Flaim and Susan Corbo of Attention2Detail in Leonia have some tips to make this year’s spring cleanup your easiest ever. From the garage to your kitchen, you can make your home the place of your dreams. And best of all, they share their advice on how to keep your home clutter-free and organized all year long.

Step 1: Get your garage in gear

"If families have time for just one spring cleanup project it should be to reclaim the garage. The biggest organizational problem for any homeowner is simply not enough storage space and not having the right organizing systems in place to effectively store the stuff they have," Flaim says. "In older homes/country homes, owners need all their rooms to really work for them, including the garage." She adds that the unstructured nature of the garage tends to make it a catchall for every member of the family. "People should think of the garage as prime real estate for additional storage. They need to think outside the toolbox and make the garage a storage powerhouse," Flaim says.

Flaim recommends getting right into the project, and easing the burden by having the entire family get involved. "Clean out and declutter get rid of anything that is no longer used, needed or functioning. Be ruthless!"

Next, sort and group the garage by category or activity, establishing a section for everything: lawn and garden, pantry, sporting equipment, tools, work-out area and even a place for your car.

And finally, get the necessary tools to get organized (containers, shelving, etc.). "Never buy until you know exactly what you need," Flaim says. "Be creative about storage possibilities; go up (the walls) and go over (the doorways), using every inch of wall and ceiling space. Remember: Even though the garage will be functional, it can still be stylish."

Step 2: The right tools

Having the tools you really need to properly organize can make cleaning a breeze. "There are many wonderful new storage systems available ranging from do-it-yourself to high-end custom designs that you can use to help clean out this season," Corbo says. "Once you know what you need to store, it is important to do your homework by visiting the various home improvement centers to see what is currently out there. Although not new, a favorite and affordable option of ours that will work in a variety of areas including the garage, attic, closet, etc. is chrome steel industrial shelving, with casters and plastic shelf liners." These shelves are adjustable and can hold up to 600 pounds per shelf. Easy to assemble and sturdy, the system is on casters, so it can also be easily moved. Best of all, they can be found at pretty much any local home improvement store.

"Also, go transparent purchase clear plastic containers (our favorite is Sterile-lite, available at Wal-Mart) in a variety of sizes that will meet your storage needs. It is important that they are all the same style to create a clean, stackable and organized look," Corbo says. She also advises labeling the containers to make it easy to find what you need, when you need it. "Cleanly label each box with an automatic label maker our favorite is the Brother P-Touch," Corbo says. "It's clean and professional-looking, and can work in every area of the house, including the kitchen, home office and linen closet."

Step 3: Baby steps

"When it comes to tackling spring cleaning, don't get overwhelmed by 'the big picture,'" Corbo says. She advises defining each area you want to organize into a zone, and tackling them one at a time. "Organizing is

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not a quick fix but rather an on-going process one shelf today, an entire closet tomorrow."

Corbo suggests scheduling regular weekly "appointments" on your calendar that work for the entire family. "For example, if you are organizing your garage, plan to spend one or two hours per 'appointment' until the job is complete. Plan something fun for the entire family as a reward for a job well done," she says.

Next, set firm, but flexible deadlines. "Even if you don't accomplish all that you had originally planned, celebrate what you have and keep moving forward," she says. "And remove distractions so you can focus it will make the job go quicker. Perhaps a babysitter or simply turning on the answering machine may do the trick."

Finally, Corbo advises acting like you're packing up and moving to a new home. "Set aside the things that you really love

and use and see what's left can you live without it in your 'new space?'" If you can, she says, it's time for that object to go.

Step 4: Thinking grand

Flaim dares homeowners to think big you don't have to stop with organizing clutter, think... kitchen remodeling. "Because the kitchen tends to be the favorite room of many homes, replacing current cabinets would be a dream storage solution for many country homeowners," Flaim says. "If budget weren't an issue, you could redesign your entire kitchen incorporating every up-to-date storage option that a variety of cabinet manufacturers have to offer. For example, choose deep drawers to store your pots and pans so they are easily visible and accessible. With a modern, customized cabinet design, each small, previously unusable space can now serve as storage for spices, baking pans and cutting boards." But even if an entire cabinet remodeling isn't an option, many companies, like Rev-a-Shelf, can retro-fit your current cabinets and drawers with a variety of updated storage solutions to help a homeowner reclaim hidden corners and maximize limited drawer space.

Step 5: Clutter-free for the long haul

"The secret to staying organized year-round is having an effective 'system' in place," Flaim says. "Create a system, however, that works for you." The rule of thumb, she says, would be to have enough structure to be able to find anything within three minutes. "More importantly, decide what your priorities are and then organize just enough to bring calm and order into your life. It's not about being perfect; it's about being organized. This should be whatever that means to you. Make each space what you believe to be beautiful, but always consider how it will ultimately function so your spring-cleaning projects will last you a lifetime," Flaim says.

Whatever organizing project you decide to tackle, Corbo and Flaim emphasize that it is important to remember that organizing is whatever works for you. It is up to each homeowner to be creative and find the best ways to make use of each space in the home.

For more about Attention2Detail, call (201) 363-9966 or visit www.a2donline.com.

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