

Super storage solutions

Staff Molly Green Magazine

It's difficult to be truly frugal without at least a modicum of organization. While an organized space is significantly more attractive than stacks of messy piles, it serves a practical purpose as well. Have you ever spent extra time looking for a pair of scissors, a screwdriver, or crafting supplies? Have you made a trip to the store to buy more batteries because you can't seem to put your hands on the package you know you recently purchased? Were you able to find an item only to discover that it was smashed, wrinkled, or otherwise unusable? If you're anything like me, you've experienced these situations more often than you'd like to admit. Whether we're keeping house, cleaning, meal planning, or couponing, organization is essential.

We live in a society where nearly every need is quickly turned into an opportunity for profit. This is certainly true with our need for storage and organization. We are bombarded with entire aisles, magazines, and even stores themselves dedicated solely to aiding us in our quest for organization. Because of this, it's easy to accept the idea that it costs a great deal of money to be organized. It also makes it easy to fall back on excuses. We find ourselves thinking that if I only had more room, scarf hangars, identically sized plastic tubs, or archival photo boxes, I could get organized. While all of those items may be nice to have, I'm afraid that none are actually necessary. With a little creativity you can get by without impressive manufactured storage solutions, and you can even do so with a bit of style.

My two favorite organizational tools are baskets and dressers. Both can often be found inexpensively at yard sales and thrift stores. This is one occasion where "age" is your friend—it just adds more character to your décor.

Dressers come in a variety of sizes and shapes, so it's fairly easy to find one that will fit your space. I have several small children's and baby dressers throughout my home. A child's dresser in my entry holds gloves, mittens and hats. A baby dresser just inside our side door (the most-used entry) holds items we need as we leave the house: extra keys, dog leashes, camera, camcorder, etc. Another baby dresser in our mudroom holds small tools, extension cords, and repair items such as duct tape. A large dresser in my dining room houses a wide assortment of craft supplies for my children (construction paper, paints, stencils, etc.), and another large dresser in the upstairs hallway holds fabric, knitting supplies, and crafting supplies.

I use baskets absolutely everywhere, and I use the term loosely. A basket can be anything from a covered picnic basket (I have several) to a large wicker tub to a small rectangular basket. When I come across an inexpensive basket that I love, I tend to nab it even if I'm not entirely sure how I'll end up putting it to use at the time. Here are some of the items I like to store in baskets:

- Children's books, spine side up
- CDs and DVDs
- Library books
- Blankets and throws
- Gaming equipment
- Paperbacks
- Cords and chargers
- Hair accessories

- Spare toilet paper rolls
- Envelopes, stamps, letter opener
- Medicines, bandages, ointments
- Homeschool materials: manipulatives, puzzles, etc.
- Remotes
- Cookie cutters (or any large collection of kitchen items)

There is much truth to the saying “necessity is the mother of invention.” Take a step back, analyze each specific need, and get creative in how to go about rectifying the situation. Over the years, I’ve come up with a few out-of-the-box storage solutions that work exceptionally well. In addition to being functional, they also garner compliments from visitors simply because of how unusual they are. In each case, I simply used something I already had.

Several years back I found myself desiring one of those impressive wrought iron pot racks to hang above my kitchen island. After a considerable amount of comparison shopping, I accepted the fact that I was unlikely to find one for under \$80. Unfortunately, that was well out of my budget at the time. I began to brainstorm workable substitutes and finally settled on an old ladder lying against the side of the garage. I had my husband cut it to size and attach cup hooks. We hung it from chain above the island, and it not only works beautifully but also is a main focal point of our kitchen.

I store rolled towels in a large crock in our country-themed bathroom, where I also use a picnic basket as a trash can. An old, wooden pop crate sits on a cabinet and holds rolled washcloths in each cubby. Another wooden box sits on the floor and contains books and magazines.

I’ve happened upon inexpensive wooden trunks at yard sales and put them to work storing extra dishes and home accessories or out-of-season coats and clothing. I stack several old suitcases next to an armchair to alleviate my need for a side table. Not only can you set items on top, but the “table” itself becomes storage. Wooden blocks work well as spice risers in the cabinet next to my stove, and a wire freezer basket holds reading materials under my coffee table, next to the sofa.

I’m not suggesting that you imitate any of these ideas, specifically, but rather that you let your creativity flow when thinking about how to best meet your storage and organization needs. By identifying your problem spots, taking one area at a time, and searching your home for possible solutions, I have no doubt you’ll come up with some super storage solutions of your own.

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