

# Copley News Service

## “Spring Home & Garden”

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### Get Organized

## It's time to come clean about the home office

By Chandra Orr

Get your gadgets in gear, tame those tangled cords and put that paper in its rightful place. It's time to tidy up your home office. With a good game plan, you can have a clean desk in no time.

#### Find a filing system

“Home offices often get bogged down with all manner of mail and bills and schoolwork, making it impossible to find anything,” said Rachel Siegel, professional organizer and founder of Spruce, a San Francisco-area firm specializing in custom organizational solutions.

The perfect filing system doesn't have to be elaborate. In fact, sometimes the simplest solutions are the easiest to stay on top of. Consider using magazine files to stow all that extra paperwork.

Label one magazine holder for each family member. If the paper belongs to that person, it goes in their bin. It's an easy way to find a home for all the stray papers, and chances are you'll find you don't need as much of that paperwork as you thought, Siegel said.

To free up even more valuable desk space, opt for a free-standing magazine rack or one that mounts on the wall.

Alyssa Willis, owner of Neat & Tidy Organizing Services in Pikesville recommends visiting the online paper management system File Solutions (<http://filesolutions.com>). “It's a fool proof system,” she adds.

Willis also mentions that “not all offices will look the same. Basically there is mail/papers coming in and mail/papers going out. There should be a container of some sort that can help with managing those papers. Nice looking containers and boxes are great in keeping supplies together and labeling those containers helps in trying to locate those items fast.”

Katherine Trezise, president of Absolutely Organized on Cranbrook Road in Cockeysville, tells her clients to schedule a yearly purging session for their files.

#### Keep things handy

The more frequently you use something, the closer it should be to your desk.

“If you have to get up to put something away, chances are you won't,” said Julie Morgenstern, author of “Organizing from the Inside Out, Second Edition: The Foolproof System for Organizing Your

Home, Your Office and Your Life,” (Owl Books, \$15). “Bring filing cabinets, frequently used reference materials and daily office supplies within arm’s reach of your desk chair.”

That goes for gadgets as well. Spring for a set of interlocking storage bins for your desk drawers to keep track of tiny USB drives and flash memory cards, and invest in a charging station to house cell phones, cameras, handhelds and MP3 players.

Most charging stations feature individual ports in each compartment for easy access to charger cords and a hidden compartment to accommodate a power strip and excess wire. Look for a model that includes label holders, which make it easy to find the right cord.

Treize recommends that her clients “think of your office as a dartboard and your desktop as the bullseye.” She says the desk should only have those items on it and in the drawers that are used on a regular basis. “Keep the things you use most frequently within arm’s reach, so you don’t have to waste time and energy getting up to use them and again to put them away.”

### **Store extra electronics**

“Most of us spend a great deal of time hooking up our new DVD players or computers, yet feel compelled to keep all of the extra cords in the box just in case,” said professional organizer Kristin Mastromarino, founder of Livable Solutions in Guilford, Conn.

Instead of dropping them in the nearest junk drawer, find one location to store all the extra electronics gear that you simply can’t part with, including cables, AC adapters, USB cords, accessories, installation CDs and instruction manuals.

Be sure to label each item with the name of the device that it pairs to. If you can’t remember what the cord goes to, it’s time to say good-bye.

### **Control those cords**

All those wayward wires hiding behind your computer create visual clutter and provide lodging for dust bunnies.

Several companies offer cable management systems, complete with specialized cord ties, bundling wraps and labels, but inexpensive options, like cable zip-ties, work just as well. The goal is to get all the excess cable off the floor. “The simplest solution is to use thick elastic bands or Velcro cord holders to wrap wires and keep them from tangling,” Mastromarino said.

As you’re working, label each end of each cord. If you need to cut power to a printer or swap out a USB cable, you’ll know which cord to pull.

Willis recommends visiting <http://cableorganizer.com>. And she too suggests using “Velcro straps that are easy to put on and take off.”

### **Stay on top of things**

Invest in a good-quality paper shredder and grab an extra recycling bin – you’re going to need them.

“The first step to keeping your office neat and under control is to limit what you bring into the office in the first place,” Siegel said. “For most people, the daily mail is the biggest source of office clutter.”

Spend a few minutes each day dealing with the mail as it arrives. Keep only what you need – bills, financial statements and personal correspondence – and discard the rest. Catalogs and weekly circulars go in the recycle bin, while credit card offers and other junk mail that contains personal information gets shredded.

When you’re done with the mail, do a quick sweep of the office. Put away pens and pencils, return paperwork to its rightful place and take the empty coffee mugs to the kitchen.

“If you set aside 15 minutes at the end of each work day to put everything away, your office will be tidy and ready for action when you come in the next morning,” Morgenstern said.

Trezise also tells her clients to “tidy up the desk area at the end of every day.” Adding, “you’ll be able to hit the ground running tomorrow.”

Willis agrees. “Get rid of junk mail ASAP. Shred, shred, shred all mail that is used for credit cards, bank statements, etc.” And she adds, “if you are not using something and have not used it in a year – get rid of it. ‘Things’ clutter our spaces and clutter our minds. The less we have the more we are free to move forward.”

*Diane Pajak contributed to this article.*