



The  
Mom  
Guide  
to

# GETTING YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

When the impossible seems just that, refer to our handy tools for spring-cleaning your home—and everything else.

▶ “Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing is like shoveling the walk before it stops snowing,” comedian Phyllis Diller once quipped. It’s no laughing matter trying to cut the blizzard of clutter and organize every last thing in your home—from toys to shoes to snacks—but there are strategies to streamline the process. And while experts say there is no single right way to tackle your family’s accumulation, here is our room-by-room guide to getting started.

by **KARINA GIGLIO**

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN SIMPSON/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANGIE SECKINGER; DESIGN BY MARIKA MEYER

**MAKE AN ENTRANCE**  
An organized mudroom means places to stow coats, shoes, and bags. This Spring Valley house even has baskets to hide clutter up top.



**SLEEP ON IT**  
A bedroom in Chevy Chase is mess-free, thanks in part to built-in shelving and a designated workspace.

# BEDROOM

Often a disorderly place because it's a private area, your bedroom may have unwillingly turned into an extra-storage zone. "Because this room usually has some free space, people keep out-of-season clothes or beach towels under the bed, but if you take it too far and have forgotten everything that's been shoved under there, it's time to take it all out," says Maryland-based personal organizer Rachel Rosenthal. In fact, your bedroom should be the first place to get an overhaul, since its ultimate purpose is to be the sanctuary in which you decompress at the end of each day.

## Box or Bag It Up



Whether you're clearing out a nightstand, dresser, or closet, be prepared to find a place for every single item by sorting into a series of lidded storage boxes, says Kousek.

### Label them like this:

- 1\_ Items to go into other rooms
- 2\_ Items to give to friends or family members
- 3\_ Items to mend and/or send to dry cleaner.

Set out clear plastic bags for things you're donating and black trash bags for things to discard. Voilà—each item will end up either back where you found it or in one of these containers.

**Pile Up the Bed** ▶ Rather than using limited counter space or cluttering the floor with items you're sorting, cover your bedspread with a clean sheet and make the most of all that surface space, says Reston-based personal organizer Susan Kousek. Use the storage-box lids to hold items as you go. Work on one "space" at a time, and remove everything from the top surface, drawers, or bottom shelf. As you group similar items together, eliminate what isn't absolutely necessary and items you don't love.

**Think Small** ▶ To keep drawers from becoming unruly, separate small items into containers, says Rosenthal. For the top of your nightstand or dresser, buy some decorative bowls and trays to catch small items like jewelry, change, and sunglasses.

**Shove It** ▶ Neatly, of course. Under your bed is the perfect place to store extra linens or clothes that aren't in season. Just purchase bins designed especially for that area. Or, attach casters to wooden boxes or wine crates, and you'll be able to roll out whatever you need in seconds.

**Bigger Is Better Unless It's a Bin** ▶ Resist the urge to invest in short, small shelving units and end tables. They may look charming, but they just aren't equipped to do what a wall of cubbies or a tall cabinet with shelves can. "These little furniture items end up occupying precious floor and wall space and become filled with a mishmash of stuff," says Jill Lawrence, a certified organizer in DC who specializes in chronic disorganization. When is it okay to think small? If you're using bins in a child's room or play area, for example. "Hugely oversized bins usually end up being used to stash miscellaneous stuff—so much that they often get too heavy to move and turn into a junk space," says Lawrence.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF BEDROOM BY ANGE SECKINGER; BEDROOM DESIGN BY MARIKA MEYER; GARBAGE BY STILL IMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; KIDS DRAWING BY FUSE/GETTY IMAGES



## How to Clean Your Most Frustrating Messes

Even if you fancy yourself a cleaning expert, there are still those times you wish you had the inside track on tricky stains. James Savary, a remodeling consultant at Washington home-repair company Fred, who has more than 20 years' experience, shares the industry's best-kept secrets to a spotless home.

### CRAYON ON WALLS

If you've been living with unwanted abstract art on your walls for fear of stripping the paint underneath, pick up a bottle of Goo Gone or baby oil. Pour some on a cotton washcloth and blot the greasy marks away. "Push against the marks and then pull away. And don't rub."

### GRIMY GRANITE COUNTERTOPS

Most cleaners are too acidic for the silicone-based sealant that coats granite, and can break it down over time. Good, old-fashioned water is your best bet. Add a drop of soap to cut

grease, and wipe down with more water to prevent filmy residue from dulling the surface. Wipe with the grain so streaks are less noticeable.

### YELLOW, GRUNGY BATHROOM GROUT

Make a 10-percent bleach solution—that's one part bleach to ten parts water—and apply it to the grout with a paintbrush. Let it sit for 10 to 12 hours and rinse with clean water for a major brightening effect. "People are amazed at the difference this easy trick makes." Bonus: The solution can also be put into a pressure washer or spray bottle to clean the outside of your house.

### STAINS ON CARPETS, RUGS & UPHOLSTERY

Tackle the stain as soon as possible with soap and water (time is of the essence). Take a coffee cup and fill it with lukewarm water (avoid hot, since it will set the stain). Add just one drop of dishwashing liquid. That's it—not a drop more! Soap's job is to attract dirt. One drop will do its best to pull out the stain. Finally, remember to dab the stain away—no scrubbing!



## ▶ The Mental Makeover

CLEANING UP YOUR ACT CAN ALSO CREATE A BETTER PSYCHOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

Managing household mayhem doesn't just make for a neater living space; it makes it easier to live with yourself—and others. "Clutter is like gum on your shoe—it slows you down and annoys you, and it keeps spreading and sticking wherever you go," says certified organizer Jill Lawrence. Not surprisingly, the psychological and emotional benefits of finally getting to the bottom of all those piles are pretty amazing.

### HELPS YOU BREATHE EASY

When things have a place and there's space to move around, the body actually gets the idea that it's time to be at peace. "The parasympathetic nervous system engages, and our organs and cells do a collective exhale," says Julie Lopez, a DC-based licensed social worker whose specialties include addictive behaviors and the emotional impact of clutter issues. For moms, this can translate into increased patience and tolerance for their kids. "The stress reduction sends out feel-good hormones and improves overall mood," Lopez says.

### MINIMIZES SPATS

"I've heard time management and disorganization cited in divorce cases," says Jane Campbell, a Rockville-based organizer with a PhD in psychology. Most of us find it hard to feel lovey-dovey when our relationship is strained by arguments over misplaced bills and uncontained mess. "As a mom, you're often dealing with clutter that's not even of your own creation, yet you're the one who has to deal with it, and that can cause anger and resentment," says Elspeth Bell, a

licensed psychologist in Columbia who specializes in clutter disorders. "Your physical environment ends up taking on emotional issues." Insisting that whoever makes the mess cleans it up—be it spouse, kids, or you—can help take the edge off.

### LETS YOU TUNE IN TO YOUR KIDS

Since clutter can make even the simplest task stressful (like getting dressed, only to find that the suit you planned on wearing for your big presentation is still at the bottom of the dry-cleaning pile), it can trickle down and impede your ability to be fully present when you're with your kids. "True engagement means using active listening skills, teaching, guiding, and planning for our children's well-being," says Lopez. "That's hard to do when you're not able to set boundaries and manage chores. Believe it or not, the stress it creates within the home can actually be the root culprit for acting-out behaviors in children."

### FREES YOU TO LIKE YOURSELF MORE

"When you feel overwhelmed by everything you need to do—and that list seems endless—there's a lot of 'OMG, where do I start?' and



waking up in the middle of the night feeling like you're forgetting something, because you probably are," says Bell. "That can trigger a lot of negative self-talk, where you're just beating yourself up." Her best advice: If something can be done in five minutes—like paying a bill or going through the mail—do it immediately instead of putting it off. The smallest successes are empowering, help you feel better, and create momentum for doing more and more.

### GIVES YOU MORE TIME FOR ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY

According to the National Soap and Detergent Association, getting rid of clutter would eliminate 40 percent of housework in the average home. And the National Association of Professional Organizers reports that we spend 12 weeks a year looking for lost items. That's a lot of "me" time that could be devoted to margaritas and romantic comedies.

### ALLOWS YOU TO LET GO OF THINGS THAT MAY BE HURTING YOU

Your home should be a respite from the world. If you're holding on to items with potentially toxic memories—say, from an ex, or a painful time in your life—you're inviting those feelings into your haven. Even something as simple as art supplies that are a reminder of a hobby you planned for but never touched can trigger feelings of failure. Purge, purge, purge.

## ▶ CLOSET

The most loved and loathed parts of the house, our closets are reminders of every size we've ever been (or never could be) and every fabulous (or ridiculous) item we've ever bought. "The biggest mistake we make is holding on to clothes that don't fit and not getting rid of bad purchases," says Kousek. "Truth is, we wear 20 percent of our clothes 80 percent of the time, so only keep what you're actually wearing."

**Let There Be Light** ▶ One of the reasons your closet contents spill into your bedroom is that the storage space is too dark. "Have a cool flat light installed over the closet door, put a standing lamp near the door (behind a piece of furniture so a child won't pull it down), or at least put up a few battery-powered touch lights," advises Lawrence.

**See Shoes Clearly** ▶ "I see people try to get organized with shoe racks, but they rarely work—the shoes just fall off and result in a frustrating pile on the floor," says Rosenthal, who recommends storing one pair per clear plastic shoebox. "You can see what's inside, and they neatly stack up even in a tiny corner." If you've been using an over-the-door pocket shoe organizer, repurpose it as an accessory holder—the divisions are just the size for sunglasses, scarves, headbands, and socks.

**Divide and Conquer** ▶ To speed up your morning routine, store related types of clothing together—sweaters with sweaters, workout

▶ "Getting organized is about changing behavior. If you devote just a few minutes daily to maintain your systems, it will save hours later on when it becomes a major project."

—SUSAN UNGER

PHOTOGRAPH OF CLOSET COURTESY OF CLOSET RENOVATORS.COM IN FAIRFAX, VA; UNGER BY EMILY KORFF/VERALANA PHOTOGRAPHY

ILLUSTRATION BY DAN PAGE



WALK-IN WONDERFUL  
Closet Renovators of Fairfax  
overhauled this walk-in closet.

### Interview Your Wardrobe

▶ Think of this as downsizing: Some will make the cut and others won't. For every item in your closet (including handbags, accessories, and shoes), Kousek recommends asking yourself these questions:

1. Is this something I don't love and don't wear often?
2. Is this something I wear only when there's nothing else clean?
3. Is this something I don't wear because it (a) doesn't flatter me (b) doesn't fit (c) has stains or (d) isn't comfortable?

Everything that meets these descriptions should find its way into one of your labeled, lidded organizer boxes.

gear with workout gear—so you can easily find what you need. For folded items on shelves, use dividers to separate the piles and prevent them from tipping over. For hanging items, separate by color or occasion, but not both. "Over-organizing can be just as overwhelming as not being organized—most people just can't keep up with that," warns Rosenthal.

**Hang Low** ▶ "The tangle of hangers is a big problem—weird, misshapen ones; unnecessarily bulky quilted ones. It's a mess," says Lawrence. She suggests investing in flat, sturdy, velvety space-saving hangers (available at Bed Bath & Beyond and Target). Bonus: Clothes won't slide off. "You want at least an inch but preferably two between each hanger," says DC-based personal organizer Carly Poppalardo. "If you're purchasing items that you've owned for years, that's stuffed-closet syndrome."

Want to double your closet capacity without hiring a contractor? Stop ignoring unused vertical space by double-hanging where you can, says Vienna-based organizer Susan Unger. A lower rod is also a great idea for kids' closets so they can reach their own clothes.

# PLAYROOM

Combine your child's Tasmanian Devil-like ability to wreck any semblance of order with your sentimental attachment to a few special toys, and you've got the makings of a playroom shambles. "The biggest mistake I see in playrooms is not teaching kids to clear out toys or setting any ground rules for cleanup," says Poppalardo. "If you start teaching them here and now, you'll avoid finding food-encrusted dishes under piles of dirty clothes once your kids are teenagers."

**PLAYFUL PLACE**  
Custom storage units in midcentury-modern colors bring a cheery atmosphere to this Cleveland Park basement playroom.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PLAYROOM BY GEOFFREY HODGSON; PLAYROOM DESIGNED BY WENTWORTH STUDIO; CHILD BY GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATIONS BY TODD DETWILER

## Create a Dress-up Station

An adjustable clothing rack on the shortest setting is perfect for hanging dress-up clothes, says Rosenthal. It helps kids learn to organize, and makes choices easier to see since they're hanging neatly rather than being crammed in a box.



**Give Every Toy a Home** ▶ Place each of your kids' toys into a pile of similar items—stuffed animals, dolls, balls, musical instruments. Instead of using a large toy box, which can easily become a bottomless pit, place each "family" in a labeled bin or basket, says Alexandria-based organizer Laine Hardman.

**Get Crafty With Artwork** ▶ Designate a space to hang your child's artwork, and replace items as new ones come home. "One of my clients purchased a large bulletin board and had a beautiful frame made for it that matched her decor," says Kousek. If you don't have the space for years and years of masterpieces (but don't have the heart to get rid of them), try taking a photo of your child with each creation as soon as she brings it home and you can use all of those images to compile a photo book.

**Seal the Deal** ▶ If toys—such as Legos—contain small pieces, opt for sealable containers. A locking lid is the only thing standing between you and the hundreds of tiny bits you'll be picking up on hands and knees when the box topples.

**One In, One Out** ▶ For every new toy that enters the playroom, one must go, advises Hardman. This is a less painful alternative to doing a purge of an overflowing playroom, and it teaches your kids not to hoard. Come holiday and birthday time, this becomes a great opportunity to let kids pick toys to donate to others.

**Take advantage of vertical wall space and leave the floor clear** ▶ Allocate bins into cubbyholes based on the height of the kid who's using its contents. The smallest child gets the bottom row. Designate the top row for the messiest and most complex toys.

## Keep Calm & Carry On: Cleaning With Your Kids



The sooner your children learn to organize, the better the chances it will become a habit they'll retain for a lifetime.



**CLEANUP TIME** will feel like play time if you give young kids the right tools: a pintsize broom with a dustpan, a customized Swiffer Sweeper (remove the middle pole to shorten the handle), a couple of small plastic snow shovels for indoor use, and a flexible plastic tote with handles for each child (let them choose their own color). Turn on a fast-paced silly song and set a stopwatch as they run around and scoop everything off the floor.



**EVEN TODDLERS** can help with chores, but make sure to give them age-appropriate tasks and lots of positive reinforcement. "Just don't expect perfection; they're just kids, so be prepared to lower your standards for a few years," says Lawrence.

**REWARD** your little helpers with a daily scoreboard—who did the fastest scooping, was most polite (no pushing), stayed on task without getting distracted—and have a weekly cleanup prize, making sure the youngest member of your crew sometimes wins. Charts and reward boards work well too, but the incentive needs to be something that truly motivates. "If stickers aren't going to cut it, then allow a small treat or extra hour of TV at the end of the week if they have kept up their end of the bargain," says Poppalardo.

**INVOLVE** your kids in preparing for the next day's classes and extracurricular activities. Have them gather their books, sports gear, permission slips, and anything else they'll need and place it by the door so it's ready to go in the morning. "I like to put a hook near the door for a child's backpack," says Kousek. Kids can also decide what they're going to wear and set it out the night before. "One of my clients tried doing this with her teenage daughter," Kousek says. "After school, her daughter said, 'I had the best day ever!' Her mother told her it was because she was prepared."



**SOAK IT IN**  
While the giant soaking tub is ideal, this bathroom really hits the mark with lots of drawer space and cabinets for clutter.

# BATHROOM

When you've got a sea of makeup and brushes, hair-care potions, and housekeeping products, needing a bathroom break takes on new meaning. "The biggest issue in the bathroom is just too much stuff. There's no reason to have ten shampoos," says Rosenthal.

PHOTOGRAPH OF YELLOW BATHROOM BY ALEX HAYDEN; BOYS BRUSHING TEETH BY JESSIE JEAN/GETTY IMAGES; MEDICAL SUPPLIES BY PAUL TAYLOR/GETTY IMAGES; LAWRENCE BY DANUTA OTFINOWSKI

► **Focus on Undercabinet Space** ► If most of the space under your sink is holding nothing but air (and a few pipes), you're missing out on several square feet of storage. A two-tiered adjustable under-sink shelf sidesteps space-hogging plumbing, as do roll-out drawers, which can double your space. If you store cleaning supplies under the sink, add a small lazy Susan for easy access.

**Untangle Your Tools** ► Blow dryers, flat irons, and other bulky styling tools can turn into a mess fast, and they eat up precious real estate. "Unless you're lucky enough to have a ton of drawer space, I love to hang styling tools," says Poppalardo. "You can use a caddy that holds everything including brushes and can be mounted to the wall or hung from a towel bar, or simplify with a small flat-iron mount that hangs over any cabinet door."

**Put Walls and Doors to Work** ► Don't let vertical space go unused. Unger suggests installing a pretty over-the-toilet shelving unit. Not only will it provide extra space for towels and other bathroom essentials, but it will add an interesting architectural element. Poppalardo suggests using perfume bottles as works of art by displaying them on floating shelves. For a kids bathroom, Rosenthal recommends hanging an over-the-door pocket organizer for storing everything from hair brushes to lotion to extra bars of soap. Think of these as the MacGyver of storage—you'll find uses for them all around the house.

► **"Organize yourself to get organized. If you dive in without a plan—without preparing a working surface like a table, boxes, bins, and labels—you'll just pull everything out on the floor and get flummoxed."**

—JILL LAWRENCE



**BEDTIME RITUALS**  
Everyday tasks are easier to get through when kids can find their toothbrushes.

**Gain a Few Inches** ► Take the guesswork out of how many containers you'll need to max out your storage by taking a few minutes before you buy. Hardman recommends measuring your drawers, cutting out a piece of newspaper that size, and bringing it with you when shopping for organizers. To keep boxes from sliding around, choose a set that interlocks, suggests Poppalardo.

**If In Doubt, Throw It Out** ► How many shampoos and conditioners does one head of hair really need? Probably not as many as you have arrayed in your shower. "Not only do shower products tend to pile up, but they expire and need to be tossed," says Rosenthal. If you still need extra storage once you've thinned the herd, hang an organizer from the shower head. If you have a towel bar in there, use a caddy with an adjustable hook.

**Sort It Out** ► Separate every beauty item you have by category—nails, dental, hair—and give each its own labeled clear bin. "The most important thing is that your bins be easy to grab and put back, so you're not making more of a mess each time you reach for them," says Poppalardo. The see-through factor ensures that you don't buy the same shade of lipstick three times because you can't find the first tube. Use counter space to display items that are pretty and used regularly—like makeup brushes and moisturizer. But make sure everything still has a place, such as an upright, clear acrylic holder.

Cotton swabs, balls, and pads not only look messy in their bags but take up more space than they should and can end up spilling everywhere. Store them in clear lidded containers that look just as nice on a counter as in a drawer.

## Micro- Manage the Medicine Cabinet

► When you're organizing a petite space with so many small items, it's important to consider what you'll have to do when it's time to clean—think about how annoying it will be to remove each hair tie and nail-polish bottle one by one and then put them all back. "Use small containers or drawer organizers to store like items so that you can just take out the container, clean, and you're done," says Rosenthal.





**KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL**  
 Bruce Wentworth of Wentworth Architects & Builders designed this Capitol Hill kitchen to maximize every bit of space.

# KITCHEN

“Even though they’re so important in our lives, most kitchens I see were quickly assembled after a move without a lot of thought about what is used on a regular basis,” says Lawrence. For this most heavily trafficked room in the house, consider some of the organizing solutions designed to keep your cupboards, counters, and drawers clutter-free.

**Rewrite Your Cleaning Act** ▶ Place basic cleaning products—like whatever you use to wipe down counters and a disinfectant—under the sink in one sturdy caddy with a handle to pull out and carry to wherever you need to clean up a mess. Install a hanging-tool organizer on the back of the pantry door for your mop, broom, and other long items—not only does it get them out of view, but it allows for quick air-drying.

**Do the Dishes—Better** ▶ “I tell clients that they can gain 15 minutes a day—just enough time for a relaxing cup of tea—by stacking their dishwasher efficiently,” says Poppalardo. “Keep all forks together; same for spoons and knives. Relocate your dish storage to the cabinet above the dish washer, and your silverware drawer as close to it as possible. It makes emptying the dishwasher a breeze!”

**Consider Location** ▶ Store items where you actually use them to save yourself steps during the breakfast and dinner rush. “Keeping mugs, coffee, and sugar near the coffee pot makes for easier mornings; same for oil and frequently used spices by the stovetop,” says Rosenthal.

**Keep Kids In Mind** ▶ Grant—and limit—access to little hands by strategically storing items on lower and higher shelves. Place cups and kid-friendly snack containers in a lower cabinet, so all members of your brood can get their own glass of water. Keep healthy snacks down low in labeled snack bins so hungry kids can find what they want without furrowing through what’s off-limits. Spinners are great for kid zones: Fill them with snacks and sandwich supplies and let your kids “play” with their food.

**Store Like With Like** ▶ Cereal with cereal, cans with cans, pasta with pasta. Use small clear containers to hold things like tea bags and marinade packets.

If your pantry shelves are deep, consider turntables for bottles of oil, dressing, and other condiments. “Use labeled baskets or containers so you can keep track of how much you have and identify items that are expiring soon to keep them from going to waste,” says Rosenthal. “It creates a system for putting away new groceries behind the ones you need to use up.” Try this in the fridge too, with fridge-safe containers.



**EUREKA EASY CLEAN HANDHELD VACUUM**  
 \$38 [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com);

## Ultimate Cleaning Products

If cleaning were fun, it would be called shopping. These superhero-like tools help you get through it fast, with less effort and more style.

Rotating brushes, crazy-strong rollers, and serious suction make this lightweight wonder (under five pounds) ideal for sucking up dog hair and vacuuming Cheerios from the kitchen floor. Bonus: It’s small enough to get the mess in the car, too.



**FELS-NAPTHA SOAP**  
 \$3.30 [soap.com](http://soap.com);

Created in the 1890s, this cleaning staple continues to attract a cult-like following (just take a look at its Facebook fan page, where devotees offer tons of cleaning uses). One of the more popular: pretreating tough stains like makeup and chocolate. Others swear it cleans a mildew-ridden shower like nothing else.



**BRENDAN RAVENHILL DUSTBIN**  
 \$149 [westelm.com](http://westelm.com);

What can you expect from what Ravenhill describes as the love child of a trash bin and a dustpan? A surprisingly sleek, chic design that gives you two essential products in one. The magnetic brush sticks to the side so it’s easy to grab, while the dustpan lifts easily off the top.



**DYSON DC65 ANIMAL COMPLETE**  
 \$650 [dyson.com](http://dyson.com);

If it’s power you seek, look no further. Dyson’s Radial Root Cyclone technology creates the maximum suction possible. Add the famous Dyson maneuvering “ball,” and even the tightest corners are easy to navigate; carpet, wood, tile are all a piece of cake, without the sore back. It’s a must for pet owners and anyone with serious ground-in dirt.



**BISSELL STEAM MOP 18677**  
 \$122 [bestbuy.com](http://bestbuy.com);

Yes, the 360-degree-swivel head reaches under counters and around toilets, but the real draw of this steam mop is cleaning any type of floor with just water. If you’re looking for a chemical-free home, it’s the way to go. Steam is a sanitizer, so you don’t have to worry about leaving germs to fester in the interest of going green.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF KITCHEN BY RON BLUNT; KITCHEN DESIGNED BY WENTWORTH STUDIO

**Have a Game Plan**



**DREAM WEAVER**  
Baskets create a clever storage solution. They are also often relatively inexpensive.

**Give Doors Double Duty** ▶ “Use the inside of cabinet doors for storage space,” says Unger. Her favorite ideas: Place hooks in a cabinet door under the sink to hang dish towels, keeping them clean and out of sight. Stick hooks for potholders inside a cabinet close to the stove and oven. Install a food-wrap holder near where you prep food and leftovers for storage. Attach an adhesive row of hooks for extra keys. Don’t forget the pantry door: It’s a huge usable space. Install a door and wall rack system and fill it with frequently used items.

**Make Even High Spaces Functional** ▶ If you can’t reach it, you can’t use it (or even remember what’s in it). Place a folding step stool under the sink and a sturdy three-step ladder with grip bar in the pantry or somewhere close by, suggests Lawrence, so you can get what you need from anywhere without having to balance on a wobbly chair. A reacher-grabber tool is ingenious for stashing paper towels and other stock-up items after a Costco run.

**Toss Out Leftovers** ▶ And we’re not just talking about food. Everyone seems to have a cabinet that’s overflowing with odd-shaped jars and plastic containers. “Match the lids and throw away any container that’s missing a top, then go through the pile again and ask if you really need that many,” says Unger. If you’re willing to start from scratch, scrap everything you have and invest in a set of small, medium, and large nesting food-storage containers.

**Add Some Dividers** ▶ Use small organizer bins to corral all kitchen gadgets by category—think small knives, openers (bottle, can, and wine), spatulas, measuring spoons and cups—so they are easy to retrieve. For base cabinets, consider installing pullout drawers. “These are the best investment, because they keep you from having to crawl on the floor to retrieve and put things away in the back,” says Unger.

**Attract the Clutter** ▶ Attaching a magnetic strip to the wall lets you store knives and kitchen shears vertically and it looks pretty cool, says Unger. Tired of using the refrigerator as a bulletin board? Use refrigerator magnets to keep invitations, recipes, and favorite photos handy by installing a piece of sheet metal on the inside of a cabinet door.

**Clear Your Countertops** ▶ Taking up prime real estate with items you rarely use—like the juicer you fire up only the first few days of every month, when you’re trying to detox—is one of the most common kitchen faux pas. “If you use the toaster every day, it’s fine to keep it out, but if you only use it once a week, store it in an easily accessible spot in a cabinet above the countertop,” says Poppalardo. The less you use an item, the farther and higher away it can go.

▶ **“Your home doesn’t always have to be neat, but it can always be organized. With kids, things are going to get messy—dishes are going to end up in the sink and toys on the floor. The key is to have easy systems to get things back to organized without resorting to hiding things in drawers.”**

—RACHEL ROSENTHAL



PHOTOGRAPH OF STORAGE BY RON BLUNT; CHALK BOARD BY C SQUARED STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES; ROSENTHAL BY DOTTIE MILLWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

# ▶ 10 Things You Should Be Cleaning with Vinegar

(AND THE ONE YOU SHOULDN'T)

Sure, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. But has honey ever taken winter salt stains off your favorite Tory Burch boots? Read on for the ten things you never knew could be salvaged with just a bit of vinegar.

**1 Wipe away water and alcohol rings.** Whip up an equal parts olive-oil-and-white-vinegar blend (like you’d use on a salad) and rub anywhere you see stubborn water stains, even on wood surfaces. Rub with the grain, and polish for best results.

**2 De-streak stainless steel.** Apply white vinegar to your fridge, dishwasher, or microwave using a soft cloth, and you’ll end up with a perfectly clean appliance.

**3 Shine up copper, brass, and pewter.** Dissolve one teaspoon salt in one cup white distilled vinegar, then add all-purpose flour to make a paste. Apply paste to metals and let it stand about 15 minutes. Rinse with clean warm water and polish to a shine.

**4 Outwit fruit flies and gnats.** Place a bowl filled with one-half quart water, two tablespoons sugar, two tablespoons apple-cider vinegar, and a few drops of dish soap on your kitchen counter (or wherever you see the little buggers). The potion attracts and drowns them—all you have to do is dump it all down the drain.

**5 Unclog the shower head.** Saturate a towel with white vinegar and wrap it around a corroded faucet or shower head. Leave on overnight; crud gone by morning.



**6 Banish stubborn stickers.** To remove your kids’ favorite weapons of mass destruction (and their sticky residue), wipe the surface repeatedly with white distilled vinegar until it’s soaked. In a few minutes, any remnants should peel off easily with no damage to the paint underneath.

**7 Make jewelry sparkle.** Submerge solid-gold pieces in one cup apple-cider vinegar for 15 minutes. Remove and dry with a soft cloth.

**8 Remove salt stains from boots.** Dip a cotton cloth or old T-shirt into white distilled vinegar, then wipe away the winter residue.

**9 Clean and shine leather.** Mix equal parts white vinegar and linseed oil. Rub the mixture into the leather and then polish with a soft cloth.

**10 Erase wine stains.** If the stained item is 100-percent cotton, cotton polyester, or permanent-press fabric, you have 24 hours. Sponge white distilled vinegar directly onto the stain and blot, blot, blot. **M**

**NEVER** use vinegar to clean wood floors. The acid in vinegar will eat away at the sealant that keeps your floor shiny, causing wood to look dull and worn.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF ELKINS