

Organizing Your Closet: Fight the Beast Within!

For most of us, our storage and clothes closets don't have enough space, are designed poorly for the way we use them, and inevitably become a clutter trap soon after we've straightened them out. How can we fight what seems to be a losing battle? A simple approach is to look at your "beast" from a new point of view, and ask yourself: "what goes on here?" If you answer honestly, keeping in mind your lifestyle today, you'll begin to develop a strategy for each storage problem that is sure to win every time.

Create More Space

To maximize your storage space in each closet, first evaluate the purpose or function for that closet and be sure you store only related items. Are there things in your walk-in closet that have nothing to do with getting dressed? As an example, your main clothes closet may contain unrelated things like linens, boxed photos or recreation equipment. (One friend told me that her husband stores his scuba gear in their bedroom closet just to keep her clothes from migrating to his side!) The goal is to designate an appropriate home for all unrelated belongings (closer to point of use) and move these items out. Multi-use closets can be streamlined by establishing a section or shelf for each category, and storing items based on need and user.

Maximizing Design Limitations

If we're lucky we have closets that are custom made for our things. If not, you can mimic a custom look by making a few changes designed to maximize use. For deep, narrow closets with a sloping ceiling (a common residential storage dilemma under stairs) consider a mobile cart of deep drawers (Elfa-style) that is easily removed to reach items stored behind it.

Other ideas for aiding problematic closet layouts:

- Add a second rod designed to hang below the top rod; this product doubles your hanging space and is sold at stores – no handyman required!
- Install additional hooks to house frequently used items that tend to get piled;
- Add shelf dividers (clear or wire) to create a boundary between piled or stacked items (sweaters, handbags);
- Place a small chest of drawers below short hanging clothes; this additional storage is helpful in deeper closets with fewer shelves;
- Investigate other space enhancing products such as belt rings, scarf hangers and multi-pouch organizers sized for handbags or shoes. Clear pocket (shoe) organizers can also be used for jewelry and small items. These products maximize space in small closets and help you find things easier.
- Upgrade your inefficient "one rod, one shelf" closet design with an inexpensive, multi-shelf/rod system that can adapt to your needs. Ask for a free closet design at your local home improvement store. If anything, this will give you new ideas.
- Replace inefficient bi-fold doors with ones that have full hinge extensions. You'll be amazed at how this increases your space and accessibility.

Avoid the Clutter Trap

The key to eliminating clutter is to establish a simple storage system that works for every user, and most importantly, is easy to maintain. In closets, actively used shelves are often hard to manage because contents are routinely used, replaced, and often seem to multiply. Minimize cluttered shelves by sorting items, designating a shelf for each category, and containing each category in open labeled containers that can be easily removed and replaced.

If needed, label the shelf at first to train each member of the household as to where things belong. (Do this in office environments too!) This works well for a hallway or storage closet packed with frequently used items such as personal care products, utility items (flashlights, batteries, light bulbs) or other supplies. Creating a labeled container for each category avoids piles and frustrating spills, and allows you to see everything you own. This method also reduces the need for duplicate purchases, thereby saving you money.

These planning guidelines are most effective when you've done your best to rid your closets of items you are not longer using or belong elsewhere. Once you've defined a plan for what really needs to be there, sort items by category and purge those that don't support your current needs.

Wardrobe Basics: Who's ready for an image update?

How often have you sifted through a bulging rod (or two) of hanging clothes and said, "I have nothing to wear"? This may indicate that you are ready and in need of a wardrobe audit, which is simply an honest review of what you wear (or don't) and why. Who wouldn't be interested in defining their style especially if it helps us to stop buying clothes that we will never wear, and convince us to part with clothes that do nothing for us? Consider hiring a certified image consultant to perform a closet audit for you. In a wardrobe audit, an image consultant will review and discuss many topics, including body type and shape, image goals, and practical clothing ideas for your current lifestyle. A wardrobe audit sets you up with a plan to dress successfully every time.

To reduce accumulated clothes, ask yourself these questions as you look at each piece:

- Do I love it?
- Does it flatter me?
- Does it help portray the image I want?

Making decisions about what to keep or toss is easier if you know that:

- It doesn't fit;
- It's clearly dated (out of style);
- You haven't worn it in 12-18 months; or
- It doesn't match the image you want to achieve.

Wardrobe Basics: Other Tips for Clothes, Shoes and Off-Season Storage

Clothing Tips

How do you remember when you wore something last? One trick is to start the season with all hanging clothes placed on the rod in the wrong direction. As you use an item, replace the hanger as you normally would on the rod. At the end of the season you'll see what clothes you actually wore, based on the direction of the hanger. If you have difficulty letting go of clothes, this is an effective technique for measuring what you don't use (or like!) and selecting items for the giveaway bag. Teach this simple trick to your friends and family members if they have bulging closets and find it hard to purge clothes they never wear.

Also, replace wire hangers with good quality hangers of a uniform size and style. Well made hangers (wood or plastic) allow clothes to drape properly and create space between pieces so you can see everything at a glance. Good hangers are worth the minimal investment and are more affordable if you purchase them in bulk at online or retail locations. When you decide to review your clothing, hang pieces sorted by color (just like in the stores) for easier retrieval.

Shoe Storage

Get current-season shoes off the floor using these ideas for easy storage and retrieval:

- Use clear shoe boxes, labeled and stacked on a low shelf or in cubbies;
- Place an open shoe rack, with 3-4 shelves, on the floor below short hanging clothes;
- Hang a shoe rack or shoe bag (multi-pocket) on an inside wall or closet door;
- Place a basket on the floor for casual shoes of similar type (sneakers, pool and beach shoes).

Seasonal Swap

If you have already developed a system for an easy exchange of seasonal clothes and items, the next step is to plan a few hours to make the swap, tweaking your system as needed. If not, here are some tips to make room for your summer-season wardrobe:

- Store out-of-season shoes in clear, flat boot boxes. Several pairs fit in one box and the boxes stack well or fit nicely under beds;
- Pack off-season clothes (sweaters, pants, suits) in clear containers (deep sweater boxes) or clear plastic/fabric hanging bags to protect from dust;
- Dry clean or hand wash sweaters prior to storage to eliminate pest damage;
- Store off-season items on high shelves in your closet, or underneath a bed.

If you would like to discuss specific organizing challenges and strategies with regard to your closets, contact Clearing House to schedule an organizing session. We will help you design and implement a system that meets individual needs.