



Get Organized in 15 Minutes, One Hour or One Day

You pick the time and task; we offer the clutter-busting tips.

by **Melissa Macron** Posted: Wed., Aug. 22, 2007 , 4:50 pm EDT



Organizing doesn't have to be a grueling, overwhelming task. Even a few minutes can make a big difference in getting clutter under control. Whether you've got 15 minutes before the kids get home or you've set aside Saturday to tackle the attic, we've got your game plan. Meet your coaches: organizational experts **Jamie Novak**, author of "**1,000 Best Quick and Easy Organizing Secrets**," **Judi Culbertson**, author of "**The Clutter Cure**," and **Laura Leist**, author of "**Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home and Life**."

15-Minute Tidy-Up

If you want to...

...Prepare for last-minute guests. It's all about surface- and spot-cleaning, says Novak. Freshen up the bathroom, then head to the room where you plan to entertain. Gather up toys, magazines, mail, papers, etc. and stash them in rooms that the guests won't see. (You don't want to dump everything in the basement or a closet — important things will be forgotten or lost. Put things where you will remember to get to them later.) Finally, shut the doors to rooms that aren't quite visitor-friendly.

...Corral overflowing collections. "15 minutes is actually an amazing amount of time in which to get things done," assures Culbertson. Try her surefire trick for doing triage on overflowing collections (such as DVDs, mugs, handbags, shoes, ties and tchotchkes): Pick out the first three items and put the one you like least to the side. Do the same with the next three. You can lessen the number of items by one-third — and still have all your favorites. Just remember to follow through by discarding the unwanted stuff!

...Manage the mail. Leist notes one of the biggest clutter culprits she sees with her clients: mail. "People bring it in and don't deal with it," she says. Open mail and discard, shred or file it as appropriate. Put magazines, newspapers and catalogs where they belong. Now the countertops and dining table are free for their intended uses!

60-Minute Clutter Control

If you want to...

...Hit the closet. “Go through your clothes closet and pick out three or four core outfits that fit well and are appropriate to your current life,” Culbertson recommends. “Make a note of any accessories you may need to buy to complete them. Once you do this, it is much easier to discard outdated, stained, non-fitting clothing and items you just don't like. Knowing that you won't go naked helps the process!”

...Tackle drawers and more. Head for the pantry, fridge and freezer, medicine cabinets and bathroom drawers, advises Leist. “People have no idea what's in there,” she says. “You can throw things out pretty easily, and organizing will make shopping easier.” Have pen and paper handy to jot down items you need to replace. Start by tossing anything that's expired or questionable (don't forget makeup and medicine!). Then ditch things you don't or won't use. Wipe down shelves and drawers and put back remaining items.

...Establish an organizing system. “A lot of us tend to think, ‘I've got an hour, let me tackle things on the kitchen counter, dining room table, on the floor, etc.,’” Novak says. “But if you're always cleaning on the surface, you'll always accumulate underneath.” Instead, Novak recommends spending that hour creating a system that will keep things from getting out of control again. A great example? “Hang a clear plastic shoe holder near the door for keys, glasses, hats, sunscreen — life's accessories at the entryway,” she says.

Saturday Clean Sweep

If you want to...

...Organize family photos and mementos. Think about different ways to organize before you get started,” advises Leist. Do you want to organize in boxes or albums? How do you want to categorize: by event, year or person? Remember, Leist says, not to get frustrated because you don't see results as you would when you organize a big room. Boxes, drawers and shelves of memorabilia, pictures, letters and papers are often the most time-consuming to organize because so much can be compacted in a small space.

...Transform an extra room. “Before you do anything, create a mental picture of the end result you want in the area,” says Culbertson. “Make a mission statement that starts with ‘I want’ and continues with ‘so I will ...’ For example: ‘I want to turn the junk room into an art studio, so I will find another place (maybe the dumpster!) for anything that does not belong.’”

...Spruce up an entire space. If you're dedicating a day to organizing, the key is to stay focused. Novak's no-fail, three-step process: 1. Sort the area and group like items together (e.g., gardening supplies, car care, art stuff). 2. Put away just what you use or love, and find really good homes (charity, sale, etc.) for everything else. 3. Maintain newly organized space. (Pssst ... You'll be so organized that, from now on, maintenance will take just 15 minutes a day!)