



## Organize Now: 10 Clutter-Busting Don'ts

By Jennifer Wennig



I can't recall how many times I've kicked off a weekend by declaring, "I think I'll organize my home." Unfortunately, those declarations have not quite resulted in a basement-to-attic shipshape house. Organizing your home can seem like an impossible task.

My biggest problem? Clutter. But not piled high in bins and covering my desk and every previously empty surface. I hate that clutter, you know, with all that cute storage stuff from Ikea and SeeJaneWork.com. I've spent oodles on baskets, accordion files, mason jars (great for loose tea and cotton balls), file totes, photo albums, letter box sets and nesting cubes. Oddly, I still can't find what I need when I need it.

Frustrated that my home-organizing routine hasn't worked wonders, I asked Cynthia Townley Ewer, Vicki Norris, Jamie Novak and Donna Smallin, four fabulously organized and creative experts, what most of us mortals do that we *shouldn't* when attempting to organize our homes.

Let's take a look at their collective top 10 organizing tactics to *avoid*. Take it from the experts — and someone who has put their ideas into action — these don'ts will show you the way:

1. Donna Smallin, author of *The One-Minute Organizer*, says **don't be concerned with reserving big chunks of time** to organize your home. "The most important thing is to get started by scheduling regular uncluttering time — from 15 minutes to an hour each day."

2. "**Don't mistake cleaning for organizing**," declares Vicki Norris, author of *Restoring Order: Organizing Strategies to Reclaim Your Life*. "Cleaning can actually create clutter because in an effort to disinfect surfaces we dump everything in sight into junk drawers and form haphazard piles thus compounding the original organizing dilemma." Norris suggests prioritizing the organization of your space first. "When items have destinations, the clutter naturally begins to clear and cleaning becomes a breeze."

3. Get creative. **Don't limit the function of a product by its intended purpose**, says Jamie Novak, author of *1,000 Best Quick and Easy Organizing Secrets*. "Over-the-door shoe organizers are perfect in the bathroom to hold hair clips and makeup, in the pantry for soup mix and snack bars and for easy-to-see supplies in the office. Use box lids, muffin tins and egg crates as faux drawer organizers."

4. **"Don't be afraid to break up sets** — sheets, dishes, canisters — as it's often more efficient than keeping them together. Just because you bought it as a set doesn't mean you have to store and use it that way," encourages Cynthia Townley Ewer, editor of OrganizedHome.com.

5. **"Don't expect products to independently solve your organizational challenges,"** offers Norris. "Products used outside a discovery process rarely work the wonders you expect. Take time to identify your actual needs and you'll be able to introduce the *right* product at the *right* time in the process.

6. **Don't organize CDs, DVDs or videos in storage units with preset slots,** offers Smallin. "You'll get it organized alphabetically or by category and then when you buy a new CD you'll have to rearrange everything to make space in the right place." Instead, Smallin suggests filing media vertically, as you would books, on a shelf using bookends if necessary.

7. When it comes to setting up a playroom **don't use lids on toy bins,** says Novak. "Lids make it difficult for children to put things away quickly and easily. Children are more likely to follow through with the clean-up process if it's easier. Label bins with pictures of what belongs inside. Bonus: In the winter, the lids make great shoe and boot trays."

8. Norris says, "Purpose your space" in every room and **don't allow the laundry room to become a catchall.** "Determine which kinds of items should live there and limit yourself to those categories. The location of the laundry room can be a useful indicator in choosing what goes into that space. If it's near an entryway, and is large enough, it can double as a mud room."

9. You've heard the "if you haven't used or worn an item in six months toss it." **Don't heed that advice** says Smallin. "Things like fancy dresses and turkey roasters may only get used once a year or so, but they do have a purpose. And it's possible that you haven't used or worn an item simply because it's been buried under a pile of stuff. When debating whether to save or toss something, ask yourself 'What's the worst thing that could happen if I parted ways with this?'" Smallin says that if you can replace the discarded item fairly easy and inexpensively when (and if) you need it, then adios.

10. According to Norris, at one time or another most of us will experience the "get this stuff out of my sight and into a storage unit" moment. But, she vehemently warns, **"Don't secure an off-site storage unit as a home organizing alternative.** Just don't do it. Not only is that a waste of money, it orphans your belongings from the rest of your home and from their point of use."