



## Plan First Buy Second

By Debbie Brinkman, Professional Organizer

If springtime puts you in the mood to do a little cleaning, tidying up and organizing, good for you. It's a great time to air out the house from winter's lockdown. The longer days seem to provide more working hours, and so we tend to find things to do like cleaning out a long forgotten corner in the basement or paying some attention to our hardworking but slightly abused closet. And then there's always the garage. Enough said.

As a professional organizer I love seeing stacks of unneeded, unused and unwanted items on the curb for garbage collection. I love to see people busying themselves with the rewarding task of clearing out clutter and organizing what's left. But there is a dark side to all this light and bright clearing and cleaning. What do you do with all that is left behind?

Chances are you are planning a trip to the store to buy some containers to neatly house all the items you didn't kick to the curb. Ah, containers. We love containers. Plastic bins, drawer systems on wheels, stackable anything, pretty fabric covered boxes with lids, mesh bins for everything from trash to pens, cute acrylic drawer sets to match our décor; the list goes on.

Stop! Danger ahead.

The problem with containers is that they can allow us to keep things we probably shouldn't. If we put it behind plastic, fabric or acrylic it's organized and so we can keep it. Not so fast! There are only a couple of reasons that are acceptable for storing: seasonal items (holiday décor, off-season clothing, off-season linens) or the item(s) require a container for proper storage (photographs, cleaning items, children's toys). If your item is something you do not need, do not use and do not love, then it needs to go away—not get stored in a \$20 bin and tucked in a dark corner.

The other problem with containers is that one size doesn't fit all. Before you start shopping for containers, you need to do a bit of work.

You need to decide which items need to be stored and how you want to store them. For example, most long-term storage should be in airtight plastic containers; short-term paper storage (photos, for example) should be in an acid-free container; maybe something pretty that can sit in a bookcase. You get the idea. What about those winter shoes? Perhaps plastic shoeboxes (can be found for as little as 99 cents each) are a great option since they do double duty and will store summer shoes in the winter.

Manufacturers make containers to fit absolutely everything. I suspect there is a secret society that creates containers then develops products to store in them. It is easy to get caught up in container hoarding. As you stroll the aisles of your favorite container vendor, it becomes overwhelming and a bit daunting. You never knew you needed so many storage vessels, did you?

Let's simplify the process. First of all, you get to decide what you need. The trick is you need to make this decision before leaving the house. You will not be able to make this decision in the store; there are simply too many choices and it fogs our thinking. Plan your purchases ahead of time.

If you are storing clothes then stack the folded clothing so that you can get a good idea of the size of container you need. Measure the area you intend to store in the container so that you don't buy something too large or too small. Remember, you are measuring for two things: 1) the capacity you need based on the contents, and 2) the dimensions of the container's final resting place.

If you are storing winter shoes, you will need to count the shoes you want to store and then decide if you want to store them all in the same container or place them each in their own container. What about winter linens? How many do you have? Will these be stored in a closet or under the bed?

The task of creating a detailed list of items, measurements and storage requirements will save you a great deal of time and money next time you visit the store. You will be able to walk down the aisles overflowing with options and not be tempted to buy containers that just won't contain anything you have. You certainly don't want to worry about storing useless containers!

Container manufacturers have responded to our storage needs by creating a plethora of choice and variety. Today's containers take up less space; provide higher functionality and quite often work into our décor quite nicely. You will be able to find what you need. Just remember to buy *only* what you need.

Stay true to the rules of spring cleaning: clear the clutter, put away winter and greet spring with open arms.

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