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Frugal Duchess

THE FRUGAL DUCHESS

Give junk drawers the heave-ho

A local organizer offers tips on decluttering.

By SHARON HARVEY ROSENBERG
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A common indoor pest plagues many homes in South Florida, namely the "junk drawer." Our catch-all drawers contain everything from old pay stubs to misshapen paper clips. And like ants on a countertop, junk drawers multiply in kitchens, home offices and recreation rooms.

Fortunately, there are many simple and frugal solutions to the junk drawer problem. Here are some suggestions from Susanne Phelps, a Hollywood-based professional organizer (www.cluttertamer.net):

- Say goodbye to the junk drawer. You're setting yourself up for disorganization by even calling it a junk drawer. Every drawer in your home should have a specific purpose.
- Empty out the drawer and wipe it down. Toss out the junk -- old pens, empty envelopes, canceled stamps. Sort the remaining items according to function.
- Box yourself in: Small containers are a blessing. Save clean boxes from bracelets, watches and checkbooks. These tiny boxes are ideal for creating order in shallow drawers. "Look at everything as a possible divider for your drawer," Phelps said.

Small cardboard or plastic containers can be arranged like jigsaw puzzle pieces within a drawer. Pencils and pens, for example, fit snugly into empty checkbook boxes.

For those who like to shop, container stores and office supply outlets carry a wide range of drawer dividers at various prices. Hardware stores sell divided trays for small tools and nuts and bolts. They are ideal for maintaining order in a desk or kitchen drawer.

If you're on a strict budget, hit the dollar store for small containers and dividers. Consider recycling old jewelry boxes, which typically have layers of divided trays. Phelps likes to organize her drawers with small, recycled cardboard boxes. When she's tired of the arrangement, she doesn't feel guilty about tossing the boxes.

"Your goal is to be able to find things quickly and easily," Phelps said. "Another goal is [to avoid buying] things that you already have."

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