



How to organize your attic

August 16th, 2010 7:08 pm

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Set aside time and be thorough as you organize your attic.
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When was the last time you took a look at your attic? Like the garage and basement, the attic is a popular place to store all kinds of items, and over time, it can become a huge mess. (Pause here to picture your attic - what shape is it in?)

Unlike the garage and basement, though, the attic is often a challenge to access, so it's easier to ignore. Unfortunately, allowing your attic to become crowded with clutter can lead to a number of hazards:

- Clutter encourages excess moisture which grows mold and mildew, damaging the contents and structure of your attic and potentially circulating into your home's living space.
- A crowded, cluttered attic is difficult to navigate, reducing the chance that you'll notice water leaks or other structural problems before they do serious and costly damage.
- A cluttered attic is often a dirty attic, and along with the dirt come insects and other pests.

If it's time to organize your attic, give yourself some time to appraise the situation and make some serious decisions about next steps. Take a look around, and ask yourself these questions:

- What are the (dangerous, damaging, dirty, unhealthy, annoying, inconvenient) problems in my attic right now?
- Which of these problems can I fix myself (with help from family or friends), and which require the [help of a professional to fix](#)?
- Once I've fixed the problems, for what purpose(s) would I like to use the attic?

Whether your attic is in serious need of repairs or if it just needs a good decluttering and reorganization, the basic steps are the same:

1. **Set aside time.** This is a project that will take some time - more than a couple of hours or a day. Be prepared to set aside whole days - or large portions of days - to tackle this task. Make appointments with yourself (and your helpers), and keep them. You'll see progress right from the start.
2. **Take pix.** Start by taking photos of the attic as it is now. These photos will serve two purposes: they'll help you see your progress, and they'll remind you of what a large task you accomplished when the job is complete.
3. **Empty the attic.** If it's possible for you to remove everything from your attic, do it. This may require that you set aside space in your garage, a room in the living space of your home, or a [portable storage container](#), but ideally, all the contents should come out.
4. **Repair and clean.** With an empty attic, take a careful look around to appraise its condition: What clean-up and repairs should you make before returning any possessions there for storage? What alterations will make it an even better storage space? For example, you may need to close holes and other access points where critters can get into the attic. If the floor of the attic is not finished, you may want to install sheets of plywood over the open joists and insulation to create flat, walkable storage surfaces that will hold the weight of your possessions. Finally, give your attic a thorough cleaning.
5. **Discard.** This is the most difficult step, but it must be done before returning anything to the attic. Box by box, pile by pile, item by item, decide what to discard, and then do it. It is not enough to clear out everything, then simply reorganize it all to return to the attic. Sort all items you no longer need or use into "donate" and "trash" piles. You'll save money and

create more space as a result of your effort. Separate these piles from the items you will keep, and get them out of your home as soon as you can.

6. **Sort.** Focusing just on your "keepers," sort them into piles to keep together when you put them back in the attic: holiday decorations, family keepsakes (sorted by relative, for example), furniture, clothing, dishes, toys, etc. Be careful not to assign items to the attic that will be damaged if you can't control heat, cold, or moisture in that space. Find other spaces in your home for delicate items you wish to keep.
7. **Contain.** For each category of items, determine how to keep them together while keeping them clean and protected from temperature swings. See [eHow](#) for good advice for storing clothes and [Helium](#) for storing furniture. Avoid cardboard containers altogether; insects love their starchy composition!
8. **Organize.** Look for opportunities to use the structure of your attic to create storage: clothing rods between rafters, shelving, and hooks. Old cabinets or bookcases left over after a remodeling project make good attic storage. See the [Howcast](#) video for attic organizing tips.
9. **Maintain.** Now that your attic is clean and well organized, take "after" pictures and compare them to the pix you took at the beginning of this project. The contrast between before and after is likely to be stark, so congratulate yourself on doing an excellent job! Maintain your attic by keeping like things together, taking things from the attic and putting them back in the containers or spaces you've created for them, and once a season (or at least once a year) making an appointment with yourself to take an hour or two for general straightening.

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