

Anatomy of an organized pantry

By Irene Woodworth

Do you ever get overwhelmed when you think of organizing any part of your home? Experts tell us it is best to start with a small project to build your confidence so that you can conquer the bigger challenges.

I was a caregiver for over five years both long and short distances for both my parents. Due to the time-consuming task, I was unable to stay organized. I decided that this year would be one where I would get back on my organization routine and downsize our household belongings. Did you know that according to the US News and World Report, "Average Americans spend one year of their life looking for lost or misplaced items?" Wow, that is a lot of time wasted.

I started doing weekly meal planning and couponing to get some routine back into my life. I realized one of the main areas that needed organization was my kitchen pantry. It is so easy just to put things in there and not see them buried behind other things. I ended up buying things I already had. Enough was enough!

I decided to take all of the kitchen pantry items out and take inventory of what I really had in there. It was an eye-opening experience. I cleaned it from top to bottom and decided it was time to update it. I had some contact paper left over from another project, and I decided that would work just as well on the shelves. It was a neutral tan and white scroll design that would work and coordinate with other colors for my finished look.

Here is my anatomy of organizing my pantry:

1. Make a plan. I have been getting various ideas for some time on my Pinterest Boards that I had filed away, so I took another look at some of those ideas.

2. Choose a style. You can choose from a variety of decorating styles that fit your personality and your home. There are various types of storage containers and labeling that will match your unique style. You can choose from contemporary, rustic, shabby chic or a traditional style.

3. Choose your containers. You will need to measure your shelves to see what size of containers will fit on them that will create drawers to corral similar items such as bottles of sauces, soups,



Irene Woodworth

smaller packaged food, etc.

There are a variety of containers to choose for your organization project. It will depend on what kind of budget you have to explore those options. There are clear or colored bins, fabric square totes, straw baskets and metal wire baskets. Since I like to do things on a smaller budget, I decided that my local Dollar Tree would meet my needs for various bins and containers to make it more organized and practical. They have a variety of sizes and colors that will fit in any pantry. I decided to purchase some white and red bins that would help me accomplish my goal.

Clear containers work the best to store flour, sugar, rice, cereal, nuts, etc. This will save you time to be able to see what is inside and how soon you will need to add it your grocery list. I have some older clear

Mason jar containers with an attached lid that have worked well for me through the years. I also purchased some with red lids that have been staples in my pantry.

Recycled glass jars that once contained pickles, peanut butter, dressing or baby food are great to use and they are free. You could always paint your lids or decorate them to match your décor.

4. Lazy Susan's in different heights work wonders because they can turn on a shelf and help you see canned items, shorter and taller jars, or containers of similar items. These Lazy Susan's actually are not so lazy in my pantry!

5. Risers and metal racks also work well for storage. They can go in areas that will increase your visibility and organization.

6. Labels. Your jars and containers need to be clearly labeled with a label maker, tags, or cards that match your desired décor. Some people like the chalkboard style that can be written and changed as needed.

I decided to use a green design with a simple font that I created on my computer. For me a heavy cardstock was best to use as a label. It will last longer and look crisp, clean and organized.

7. Spices. Another big part of this project was organizing my spices. I had all sizes and kinds that needed a better system. I found some larger, metal round containers with see-through lids that would work for me at the dollar store. I bought all they had in stock and then went online to order a case of 24 to finish this task. The case was sent to the store, and this saved me any shipping charges.

I have my spices in a drawer, with two stacked on top of each other alphabetically. I may later get some metal strips that can be mounted on the wall to display them, since they have a magnetic bottom. It was fun to label them and get them organized. It hardly takes any time to cook with these spices now, since they are organized in a drawer.

8. Larger items such as cooking pots or larger cleaning containers may need to be stored on the floor. I put some in matching containers that helped me to corral them together.

No matter where you are in organizing your home, I hope that my project will encourage you to update and simplify your life, beginning with a smaller project like I did with my pantry. "Inch by inch life is a cinch, but by the yard it is very hard!" I have to go now to continue another organizational project in my home one section at a time... ●

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It's often hard to find what you need in a disorganized pantry. There are ways to simply and inexpensively organize a pantry so that hunting for items becomes unnecessary. (Photo courtesy of Irene Woodworth)