

Divide and conquer: A place for every document

✓ Create a "To Be Filed" inbox, tray, basket or folder to hold things you want to save but don't have time to deal with immediately.

✓ Set up two kinds of files: a tabletop holder or basket for frequently used active files and a filing cabinet or box for permanent files.

✓ If you are a piler not a filer, buy stackable trays or flat document boxes, label them and use them as you would file folders.

✓ Set up a designated area for opening mail, with a shredder, recycling bin and trash can nearby. Also have a bin for bills to be paid; put in bills and payment envelopes only.

✓ Teach kids how to use a filing system to keep track of school papers. Keep a step file (a staggered desktop file holder) near your family's backpack drop zone. Label a folder with each child's name to hold permission slips, party invitations and sports schedules. Show kids how to put things in there that need your attention in the evening, and how to empty it of paperwork that should return to school in the morning.

✓ Put up a bulletin board for invitations, postcards and personal letters you might want to read again but don't want to file for eternity. Weed

✓ out once a month. Use hanging files with manila folders inside. Line up the file tabs on either the left or right side, so they are easier to flip through.

✓ Make copies of important documents, such as deeds, car titles, savings bonds and birth certificates. Store in a designated folder. Consider scanning these to keep in an online folder as well. Originals of most of these documents should be in a safe-deposit box.

✓ Stick to a regular filing schedule that works for you, whether it is once a week or once a month.

✓ Professional organizers avoid using paper clips in favor of staples, so paper won't get caught. They suggest filing in chronological order, so the most recent sheet of paper added to a file will always be on top when you open it.

✓ Check with your accountant, attorney or www.irs.gov for record retention guidelines for tax, legal, investment and other important documents.

✓ Declutter permanent storage filing cabinets annually. Replace worn-out folders. Remember, overstuffed file drawers are deterrents to keeping up with filing.

— Jura Koncius

Useful Web sites

www.containerstore.com: The basics and more, including sturdy and stylish British-made Bisley steel filing cabinets.

www.freedomfiler.com: A filing system, favored by many professional organizers, based on dates. Color-coded labels guide you through what to keep for how long.

www.getbuttonedup.com: Four women share what they learned about organizing their lives.

www.napo.net: The National Association of Professional Organizers provides lots of tips and describes what professional organizers do.

www.russellandhazel.com: This online retailer offers a fresh take on office supplies and decor.

www.schoolfolio.com: A welcome solution for filing kids' oversized artwork.

www.seejanework.com: Products to help manage time efficiently and with style.

THE SHOPPING GUIDE



Refreshing your organizing arsenal can help you focus on controlling paper. The **Sloan desktop file**, in chocolate brown retro-pattern fabric, allows easy access to active files (\$30 at the Container Store). Russell & Hazel's metal **Collator** folds up when not in use (\$30). Dump plain manila folders for something sassy (from top): orange and flower versions from the **Chocolate Kimono folder set** (\$7 for six at Paper Source), **Stripes folders** by Filex (\$10 for six from See Jane Work), **Greek key folders** by Jonathan Adler (\$10 for six from See Jane Work). **Stainless-steel shredding scissors** destroy documents without taking up a lot of space (\$9 at the Container Store). If you're more of a box person, try the **Basic Letter Box**, covered in laminated paper (\$10 each from See Jane Work).