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Getting That Linen Closet Organized

Changing seasons offer opportunities to sort sheets and towels.



By Marilyn Campbell
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The autumn season brings falling temperatures and a need for bed linens with heft, but if digging out flannel sheet sets and wool blankets means rummaging through a stash that includes everything from shampoo to flashlights, it might be time for a linen closet reorganization.

The thought of sorting through piles of pillowcases and hand towels is enough to send some into hibernation until next spring, but fear not. Local organizing experts are here to help.

“Organizing a linen closet is a great small project that you can do in a short amount of time that will give you a real sense of accomplishment,” said Jody Al-Saigh of Picture Perfect Organizing in Arlington. “Often, I suggest a small area like a linen closet as a starting point for clients who have a whole house to organize because it provides a real sense of fulfillment in a short amount of time.”

Begin by emptying out the linen closet. “Toss any torn or stained, ratty and old items,” said Al-Saigh. “You can often donate old rags to animal shelters who use them in cages for comfort for the animals.”

Next, start sorting. “What you’re going to do is go through your sheets. The goal is to have two sets of sheets per bed, three if you have a lot of space,” said Eileen LaGreca of Sensational Spaces in Fairfax. “Some people like to store their sheets by sets. Others like to have a shelf of all flats or all pillowcases.”

LaGreca recommends sorting towels next. “A general rule of thumb is to have two or three towels per person in the house: a bath towel, a hand towel and a washcloth,” she said. “Everything else you don’t need.”

Once you decide which items will stay and which will go, it is time to choose a system of organization. “Depending on the size of your linen closet, you can organize by room or by person in the household,” said Al-Saigh. “[If you are sorting] by room, have all the sheets for the guest room in one area, all the sheets for kids’ room in another, all the towels, washcloths, bath mats ... together.

Once the purging, sorting and organizing are complete, it’s time to refold and restock. “Fold the sheets as neatly and compactly as possible and put all sheet sets together inside the pillowcase,” said Al-Saigh. “This keeps everything together and keeps the closet



Photo Courtesy of Picture Perfect Organizing

Professional organizers say creating an orderly linen closet is easier than one might think.

looking tidy and uniform.”

How should one keep those newly folded stacks of linens from toppling? “A good product to have is shelf dividers that you can get at the Container Store,” said LaGreca. “They slide right onto the shelves and keep the piles separate so things aren’t falling over.”

Susan Unger of ClutterSOS in Vienna adds, “If you’re short on space, one thing that works well for the blankets are the space bags where you can vacuum out the air and stack the blankets in the closet.”

ACCESSIBILITY IS ANOTHER KEY. “The sheets and towels should go pretty much eye level within your closet,” said LaGreca. “Things that are used less frequently, say for guests or for seasonal use, can go either on the top or the bottom shelf.”

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Unger adds, “To keep the sheets smelling nice you can put a fabric softener sheet in between the sheets in the closet or hang some sachets on the door or in the closet,” said Unger. “It keeps it closet nice and fresh.”

Organizers say it’s also possible to neatly store other bathroom-related items in a linen closet. “I like to have sets of different kinds of bins where people can keep their medicines, lotions or toothpaste or toiletries in the linen closet, which is a good place for extras” said LaGreca. “Just keep them sorted and together in separate bins.”

Whether one chooses clear, plastic bins or decorative boxes, labeling and accessibility are important. “When you think of neat linen closets, you think printed labels or frilly labels,” Al-Saigh added. “You are going to be reaching for the containers often, so in addition to labels, it is nice to have a handle so that you can grab it easily. You can even use ornate, pretty baskets.”

“I really recommend even labeling the shelves,” said Unger. “Labeling is really good because anyone going in to the linen closet can find what they need.”