creative + fun ideas for paper storage

INTRODUCTION

One of my underlying philosophies is that organizing and creativity go hand-in-hand. Organizing creates space for creativity, and creativity makes organizing more fun! I firmly believe that the more you love an organizing solution, the more likely you are to use it—and use it effectively! Adding creativity and fun to your storage ups the *love factor*, helping ensure you'll be motivated to use your organizing solutions going forward.

Consider this: a creative and fun storage solution is more delightful to look at. This means you're more likely to keep it in sight. If you're a visual person, who needs to see something to remember you have it, keeping your papers in sight can make or break your systems' effectiveness. Out in the open storage also makes it easier to access your papers—which is a good thing for anyone.

There are essentially two ways to infuse your paper organizing storage with creativity and fun. Option 1 is to buy pre-made solutions. (And if you've been out shopping for storage lately, you'll know this is a lovely option.) Option 2 is to alter existing storage solutions so they really suit your style.

In the pages ahead I'll show you how to do both. If you love to make things, there will be plenty of ideas to whet your creative appetite, plus instructions for basic paper crafting techniques you can use to alter your paper storage. If you aren't a fan of paper and glue, that's okay, too. I'll share plenty of ideas you can use right from the store. Ready? Let's go!

STORE-BOUGHT STORAGE SOLUTIONS

In recent years manufacturers have started introducing creative and decorative storage options for paper. This means that just because a container is store-bought, doesn't mean it's plain, plastic or ugly! Here are some ideas for store-bought storage and how to use it creatively.

Repurpose Containers

A great way to add creativity to your storage is to look at containers with a fresh eye.

✳ **Use a metal planter as a file box.**
I found this metal planter on clearance at Cost Plus World Market last summer. Now, most people would see a metal planter. But with creative organizing eyes, you'll see this container and think "file folders!" Let's use this container to corral action files on the kitchen counter.

✳ **Convert a picnic basket into a filing system.** Fitting a metal file cabinet into a living room or family room can be awkward. But if this is where you handle your paperwork, it can be the best location for storing your files. A wicker picnic basket can be retrofitted for file storage, and blend into your room's décor much more easily. Add a hanging file folder rack and some file folders, and you've got a filing system that's cute enough to have on display in your living spaces—making it a breeze to keep up with your filing.

✳ **Use a serving tray as an in-box.** Any colorful tray originally designed for serving food can be repurposed as an in-box. Choose a tray you love, and you'll have even more motivation to see the bottom of it each and every day! Plus, if the natural place for your in-box is on your kitchen counter (because that's where paper lands anyway), your empty tray will look right at home.

✳ **Use an ITSO storage box for file folders.** These narrow plastic boxes are part of the ITSO system from Target. Like the metal planter above, the size and shape is perfect for an action file box. Simply add some file folders in your favorite color or style, and you've got an action system simply by looking at a basic container with a fresh set of eyes.

Shop for Vintage Containers

If you love to shop in antique stores, keep your eyes open for vintage office storage products. From metal file sorters that you can spruce up with a coat of spray paint, to antique wire in-boxes, a touch of vintage can add a stylish flair to your paper storage systems.

You can also find file boxes at antique or resale shops. My business card file, for example, is an antique store find. Keep your eyes open and you never know what you'll discover to creatively fill a paper organizing need.

Shop on Etsy:

If you aren't up for creating your own paper storage products, take a quick tour of www.etsy.com. This website features all sorts of homemade items including pretty and stylish items you could use for organizing your paper. Here are some ideas to look for.

Photo courtesy Jill Heupel Photography

✳ Look for eco-friendly address boxes like this one from Jill Heupel Photography. Use these for organizing business cards and address cards. Search for address boxes, or card files.

✳ Search for fabric button paper clips and handmade magnets to dress up plain bulletin boards and magnet boards.

✳ Find decoupaged trays and boxes. Consider using a tray as an in-box.

✳ Look for handmade bulletin boards like the hoop.dee.do from Little Pretty Studio.

Photo courtesy Little Pretty Studio

Photo courtesy Little Pretty Studio

Purchase Stylish Office Products

There's never been a prettier time to get organized. Seriously, there are so many high-style storage products available today, the hardest part isn't finding attractive storage – it's deciding which items to take home and call your own! Here are some of my favorites.

✳ **Russell & Hazel.** Manufacturer of binders and binder accessories. Available at **www.russelandhazel.com**.

✳ **DiVOGA from Office Max.** This is a fairly comprehensive line of paper products including file folders, desk accessories, binders, binder clips, paper clips and even pencils. Visit **www.officemax.com** and search Divoga, or head to your local Office Max to check out the line.

✳ **Gartner** makes stylish file folders, notebooks and journals which are available from Office Depot.

✳ **Staples** (www.staples.com) carries a complete line of stylish paper organizing products from **Martha Stewart.** The line includes labels, tags, file folders, binders, boxes, and more!

✳ Other online retailers to check out include **www.paper-source.com**, **www.containerstore.com**, and **www.seejanework.com**.

The Divoga line from Office Max is fast becoming one of my favorites!

ALTERED STORAGE TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

TIP 1: SELECT PAPERS YOU LOVE

One of the keys to creating altered storage you will love is to start with paper you *love*! To say I love the Romani line from Basic Grey is an understatement. I adore this paper, and use it whenever I can in my creative organizing projects. Browse the aisles of your local scrapbook or craft store for paper *you* love, keeping these tips in mind:

✳ **Consider location.** Where will you be using your finished projects? What colors and patterns will work well in that room?

✳ **Use a coordinating line.** A coordinating line takes the matching and guesswork out of the creative organizing process. When sticking to a coordinating line, you'll get paper in a variety of patterns and styles, and here's the best part—they're all designed to look great together. This will give your projects a designer touch!

✳ **Use patterned paper or cardstock with a white core.** When sanding the edges of your paper or cardstock, you'll get a white border on the edges of your project (which looks pretty cool!).

✳ **Use thicker, higher quality papers.** With gluing and decoupaging techniques, thicker paper works better. You'll experience less bubbling and wrinkling (which means more grinning on your part).

TIP 2: INVEST IN SOME BASIC TOOLS + SUPPLIES

With a few basic craft supplies, you can add creative touches to your paper organizing projects. Here are some handy basics to have on hand.

✳ **Paper trimmer and / or paper cutter.** A large paper cutter works great for trimming file folders. A personal paper trimmer, designed for scrapbooking and card making, makes easy work of cutting paper straight.

✳ **Craft glue stick.** My favorites are UHU® stic (yes, that's how UHU spells it) and Scotch® Craft stick.

✳ **Decoupage.** I like ModPodge®, in part because the smell takes me back to my childhood. I'm happy with the results I get, too!

✳ **Foam brushes.** You can pick these up at a craft supply store. No favorites to share on this one. Any foam brush will do.

✳ **Craft punches.** A corner rounder, a circle punch, and file tab punches are great tools to add to your creative organizing toolkit. Check out punches made by McGill and EK Success.

✳ **Scissors**, of course.

✳ **Foam sanding sponge.** I like the 3M full-size sanding sponges, because they're easy to hold. These are available at retailers such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot.

✳ **Project-specific supplies** such as patterned paper, cardstock, stickers, rub-on letters, and ribbon!

TECHNIQUE 1: DRESS UP PLAIN FILE FOLDERS

Why? Plain manila is about as fun as plain vanilla, which is fine behind closed doors. But for files you want or need to keep out in plain sight, pretty file folders are a much more delicious option!

How? Essentially, dressing up a plain file folder is as simple cutting cardstock and gluing it to a plain file folder. Easy, right? If you'll be adding decorative tabs (see below) use straight cut file folders, or trim off tabs covering your folder with patterned paper.

Tip: It isn't necessary to cover the entire front of each file folder. Save yourself time and money by creating a covered chipboard panel to place in the front of your file box or basket. Simply cover a sheet of heavy chipboard with patterned paper. Start with a sheet of patterned paper that is larger than your chipboard. Liberally apply glue stick to the front of the chipboard and adhere the patterned paper. Rub the patterned paper with your hands to ensure adequate adhesion to the chipboard. Then, fold the edges of the patterned paper under and glue them to the back of the chipboard panel. Voilà! No one will ever know about your half-decorated file folders!

Step-by-Step For each file folder you wish to embellish, follow these steps.

Step 1: Trim the rounded edges off of each file folder using a paper cutter. Then, round each folder's corners using your corner rounder. (You may be wondering why I do this step. The paper you glue on top of your file folder will stay attached and intact better if the round corners of the file folder and the

rounded edge

patterned paper match up exactly. In other words, the patterned paper will fully cover and therefore be fully supported by the file folder underneath.)
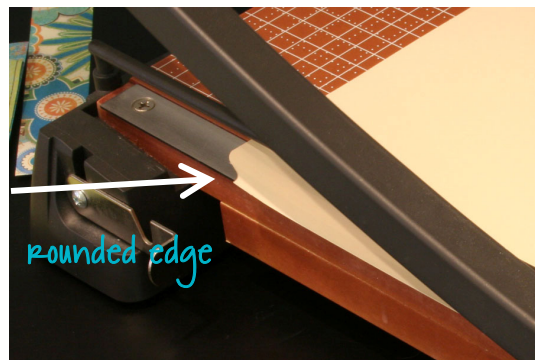
Step 2: Select a sheet (or series of sheets) of 12" x 12" patterned paper to use for your file folders. For each file folder you will decorate, use your paper trimmer to cut a 1-1/8" wide by 12" long strip of patterned paper.

Step 3: Open each file folder and use glue stick to attach one patterned paper strip across the top, back edge of the folder. The patterned strip will hang off the edge of the file folder; let this be for now. Turn over the folder and allow glue to dry for about ten minutes.

Step 4: Once glue stick has dried, trim excess cardstock using scissors.
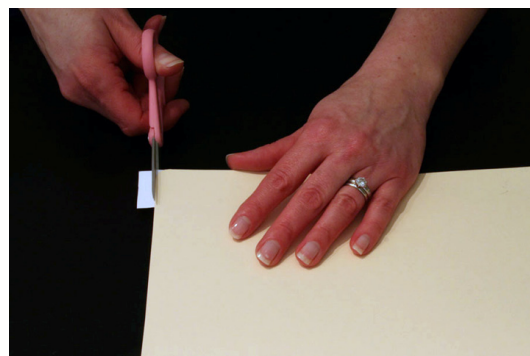
Step 5: Round corners of file folders with corner rounder.

Step 6: Add tabs to your folders using the following steps.

TECHNIQUE 2: CREATE YOUR OWN FILE TABS
Why? It's just one more chance to make your paper storage fun!

How? There are a few ways to do this. Here are some of my favorites.

Tab Punches + Rub-ons:
Use a tab punch and rub-ons to label file folders for a tickler file.

Mini file tab punch or round tab mini (shown) from McGill. Rub-on numbers from American Crafts.

Tip: If you're making a tickler file, place seven tabs across per row (before duplicating positions). This will allow you to easily move things one week ahead in your tickler file. The same day next week will be the folder directly behind today's folder.

Peel and Stick Tabs + Computer
To create your own file tabs, first download and save the file called: *filetab-template* from the online classroom. Open this document using Microsoft Word. Type your file names into the document, replacing the existing text "type your file name here" with your own file folder name. Once you have typed in all your file folder names, print your tabs onto a piece of paper of your choice. (Remember, go for a color you love!)
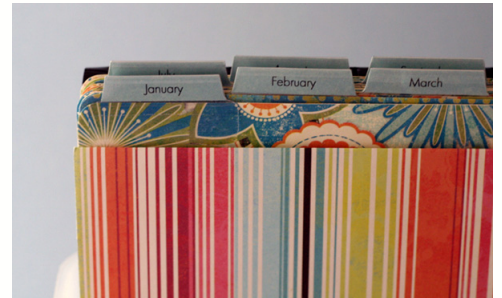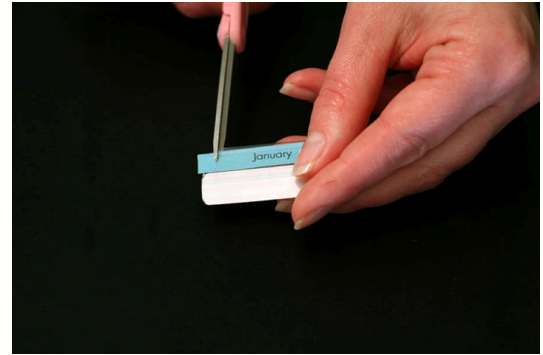

Next, cut the tabs following the guides on the printed Word document. Fold the paper tabs in half and insert them into their plastic tabs. There will be some overhang.

Center the tab so there is even overhang on each side of the tab. Trim using scissors.
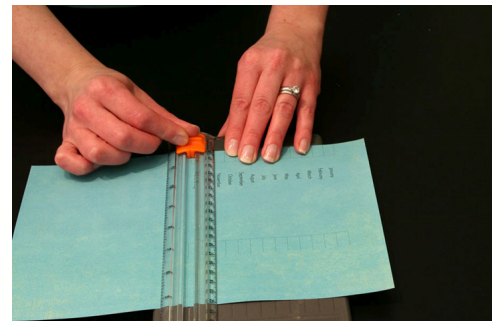
❝ These clear index tabs (1-1/2" x ½") are from Z-International. I buy mine from Office Max. **❞**

Attach tabs to your file folder by first peeling the backing off the back of tab only and securing into position. Then, remove backing off front of tab, and adhere.

Circle Punch + Letter Stickers

This method works great when creating reference or action file folders for your family members—assuming everyone's name starts with a different initial! Simply punch two round pieces of cardstock using a circle punch. Apply glue to the backs of each circle and sandwich the file folder between the circles. Use a letter sticker to designate the folder's owner.

Patterned paper strips, corner rounder and rub-ons

If you don't want to invest in a file tab punch, create your own tabs using strips of cardstock and a corner rounder punch. Here's how.

✱ Cut strips of cardstock or patterned paper 3" long by approximately 1-3/8" wide.

✱ Fold strips in half, right side facing out, and round corners using a corner rounder.

❝ This file folder solution uses even less patterned paper. The tab is the only embellishment. Simple, but fun. **❞**

✱ With tab still folded, label the tabs using rub-on letters or numbers.

✱ Attach tab to file folder using glue stick.

Create Your Own Combination!

Remember, the idea here is to whet your creative appetite. Use supplies you love and already have on hand. For example, letter stamps and ink would work beautifully!

TECHNIQUE 3: DECOUPAGE ANYTHING (AND EVERYTHING!) MADE OUT OF WOOD

Why? Altering wooden items like trays, boxes and frames is fun and will give your storage a one-of-a-kind look!

How? The basic technique I use to alter a wooden object with decoupage is as follows:

Step 1: Select the patterned paper and other supplies you will use for the project.

Step 2: Paint any surfaces of the object that will not be covered with decoupage. Allow paint to dry thoroughly before moving on.

Step 3: For each surface you will cover with patterned paper and decoupage, cut patterned paper slightly larger than the surface to be covered. You don't need to be precise at this stage; you'll sand away the edges later.

Step 4: Attach the paper to the wood by using a liberal amount of craft glue stick. Use your hands to rub the paper well to ensure that it's firmly attached, especially along the edges. Apply more glue if needed and allow it to dry completely.

Tip: You can use decoupage to adhere the paper to the wood. I prefer to use craft glue stick because it is drier than decoupage. This helps prevent the paper from wrinkling and bubbling, which can a bit annoying. To ensure adequate adhesion of the paper to the wood, it is very important that you liberally apply glue stick to the wooden surface and then rub the paper thoroughly with your hand.

Step 5: Using a foam sanding sponge, sand the outer edges of the cardstock to remove any overhanging paper. This will also give the paper a worn look, if you use paper with a white core.

Step 6: Apply decoupage over the paper. Use very thin coats to help prevent the paper from peeling away from the wood. I usually use two very thin coats, allowing decoupage to dry for about fifteen minutes between coats. And remember—think thin (thin coats of decoupage that is!).

Step 7: Dry thoroughly and enjoy using!

examples + variations:

In-box

I created this in-box using the steps above, with the following additional steps. For the tray's inside bottom, I measured the inside dimensions of the tray and cut the cardstock to size using my personal paper trimmer. I sanded the edges of the patterned paper ahead of time by placing the patterned paper on an old clipboard, and sanding with a foam block (so all edges, including the inside, would have that worn look I love).

To add a dose of motivation while using my in-box, once the patterned paper was adhered (but before decoupaging), I used letter stickers and rub-on letters to create fun and motivating messages. On the inside bottom of my tray I wrote: "You did it!" "Woo-hoo!" "Way to go!" On the outside I wrote: "Temporary holding bIN" with the "in" emphasized to mimic the traditional in-box label. The words are subtle, so not to take away from the design, but the message is clear: This box is not meant for long-term storage.

If you make an in-box or tray, consider adding other words to the outside edges of your in-box like "Get to the bottom of this!" Use words and phrases that will make you smile and help motivate you to empty your in-box on a daily basis.

Magnet Board

To create this magnet board, I followed the basic steps outlined above, but I completely painted the frame before beginning. The patterned paper was cut into squares and rectangles sized to barely overhang the edges of the board. I didn't get carried away with perfect or uniform shapes, but instead just went for straight edges. I trimmed as I went along, often letting the design on the paper dictate the size of the paper rectangle. The gaps were filled in with solid paper cut into skinnier rectangles.

Before gluing the patterned paper to the frame, I sanded the inside edges of the cardstock using a sanding block. (This gives the feel of grout between paper "tiles.")

Magnets:

Small wooden tiles can be used to create custom magnets following the steps above. Use rub-on letters to create messages or other labels to categorize your paper. Then, use a hot glue gun to attach magnets to the back of each wooden piece.

This pen holder was made by using a glue gun to attach a piece of ribbon to the back of the wooden disk. The ribbon is sandwiched between the magnet and wooden disk.

Paper Clips:

Give your stacks some order by creating paper clips. Use the process described above for creating magnets, but instead of gluing a magnet to the back of the wooden disk, glue a large paper clip, instead!

Chipboard Tags:

Use the same technique as described above for magnets, but adhere patterned paper to chipboard tags instead of paper. Tie your tags to your container using ribbon…and call it a (creatively organized) day!

I use this metal bucket to transport papers and other items between my home office and my main living areas.

Since the office is where I work the bucket is labeled "take home."

TAKE ACTION!

First, make sure you read through Lesson 3 and decide what types of storage will be best for you and your paper storage needs. Then, with your particular storage requirements in mind, use the ideas in this handout to give your storage a fun and creative touch!

Happy creating!

Aby