

ORGANIZING

Cool organizing tips for your refrigerator

Most of us would probably agree that the kitchen is the heart of the home. We find ourselves in the kitchen not just around mealtimes, but also when we want a quick snack or beverage. It's also the space where people naturally gather. If the kitchen is the heart of the home, the refrigerator is the heart of the kitchen.



Angie Hyche

Whether we're gathering ingredients to make dinner or just perusing the contents for a snack, we're all looking for a positive experience when we open that refrigerator door.

An organized refrigerator looks better, but it also functions better. We're able to quickly find what we need, and we don't waste as much food. We've probably all witnessed the horrors of finding the casserole that time forgot. Or realized way too late that those coveted leftovers from our favorite restaurant are past their prime. Wasted food is wasted money, and no one takes pleasure in watching their funds go down the drain.

Organizing the refrigerator is a simple task with just a few steps that reaps plenty of benefits.

CLEAN IT OUT

Clear some space. To do a thorough refrigerator organization, you'll need to empty it completely, so you'll need space to set out all the contents as you go.

As you remove items, get rid of anything that's past the expiration date. If it's not expired but you know it won't be eaten, throw it away (or donate if unopened).

As you remove items, sort them into categories (dairy, meat, fruits, vegetables, condiments, etc.).

Give your refrigerator a good cleaning. Now's the perfect time to break out the cleaning and disinfecting products and wipe



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down every surface inside and out. Don't forget to clean the drawers and shelves.

Before replacing anything, add a deodorizer. Baking soda is a good and inexpensive choice.

PLAN THE LAYOUT

When deciding on your refrigerator layout, you'll need to keep in mind two factors. First, take into account health and safety when deciding where to store items. Since the refrigerator door tends to be the warmest area because it's so frequently opened, it's not a great choice for foods that need to be kept very cold (like milk). Also consider what items your family most frequently reaches for so they can be most accessible. If you have young children, you may want to purposely keep some items higher up so they can't reach them. As you're planning the layout, keep in mind that most refrigerators have adjustable shelves in the main section and the door.

The general principle of keeping like items together is the most helpful principle to use for grouping. It's easiest to consider

the refrigerator arrangement in terms of zones.

— Refrigerator door

This is the warmest section, so don't store eggs or milk there! The refrigerator door is a great place for less perishable items like condiments, sauces and butter. If you have children, the lower shelves are a great place to store their drinks and snacks.

— Upper shelves

This is a good location for items with a short shelf life because we see them first. I love the idea of having an "Eat Me First" area or container for food that will expire soon. Leftovers are a good choice for this area; I recommend that you mark them with the date they were originally put into the refrigerator. You can save space and have longer lasting leftovers if you take them out of the restaurant's containers and store them in reusable containers. If you're not sure whether something is still OK to consume, the website foodsafety.gov has a great Cold Food Storage Chart. Ready-to-eat items with a shorter shelf life like yogurt, sandwich meat and cheese work

well in this area. I often place healthy items I want to eat more often (like a plate of fresh vegetables and dip) on the upper shelves because we generally tend to choose what we see first.

You don't need organizing supplies to have a well-organized refrigerator. However, if you'd like to invest in some helpful supplies, here are a few recommendations:

Clear bins (without lids in this case) that can be labeled are always a good choice.

A Lazy Susan is helpful for frequent use items for easier access.

If you use a lot of canned drinks, an organizer for those is helpful, especially if it has a top so that other items can be placed on top.

You can attach small baskets with suction cups to the side of the refrigerator for items like string cheese.

— Lower shelves

Use the same principles you used for the upper shelves (group like with like and use containers if needed). Lower shelves are the coldest, so they're best for meats. Always keep raw meat separate and as low in the refrigerator as

possible in case it leaks!

— Crisper drawers

Most refrigerators have two crisper drawers at the bottom of the refrigerator that are adjustable for humidity. Using one drawer for fruits and one for vegetables works well. However, different types of fruits and vegetables have different humidity requirements.

A high-humidity drawer (with a closed vent) is best for thin-skinned or leafy vegetables like spinach, lettuce and herbs. The high-humidity environment helps the veggies stay crisper and last longer.

The low-humidity drawer (with an open vent) is better for fruits and vegetables that can rot like avocados, apples, pears and most fruits. These foods give off ethylene gas as they ripen, which can damage other produce. You can separate different types of fruits and vegetables using adjustable drawer dividers (or produce bags) to alleviate this problem. Placing paper towels across the bottom to collect onion skins, stray leaves, etc., that some foods tend to shed can help keep them clean. Just switch them out as needed.

When you return from the grocery, place items in the correct location. Repeat this process again in a few months or whenever necessary to keep your refrigerator clean and fresh.

Celebrate the fact that there are no lurking expired mystery foods, and enjoy your organized refrigerator!

KEEP THE ORDER

Once you've replaced everything, continue to tweak as necessary depending on how it functions. Teach everyone in the home the new arrangement. When you return from the grocery, place items in the correct location. Repeat this process again in a few months or whenever necessary to keep your refrigerator clean and fresh.

Celebrate the fact that there are no lurking expired mystery foods, and enjoy your organized refrigerator!

Angie Hyche is a professional organizer and the owner of Shipshape Solutions. Her first book, "Unholy Mess: What the Bible Says about Clutter" is now available. You can email her at angie@beshipshape.com.

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