

# exhale

“Ideas to help you organize, simplify, slow down, and exhale...  
because life’s more fun when you’re not holding your breath”

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## here’s the idea: tools we love to love

**This issue pays tribute** to those simple, inexpensive, but often ingenious “cool tools” that can serve you very well throughout the house, on your travels, and perhaps even in your workplace. Beyond their intended uses, be creative about repurposing them to meet other needs in your life. For example...

- Don’t let your kitchen’s junk drawer get you down. Tame it by booting everything that doesn’t belong in this prime piece of real estate, inserting a **drawer divider**, and putting the “keepers” back into their own little slots. You can buy a drawer divider, or give new, useful homes to your collection of Altoids tins, frozen-dinner trays, checkbook boxes, baby-wipe containers, yogurt cups, or Tupperware without lids.
- **Egg cartons, muffin tins, and ice-cube trays** can serve as drawer dividers as well, but they can also house earrings, rings, or small bracelets and necklaces; office supplies such as paper clips and push pins; small Christmas ornaments; beads, sewing needles, pins, and thimbles; and nails, bolts, and screws. Once loaded, place the whole tray or carton inside a drawer, and stack them if you need more than one.
- A **silverware tray** can lend a hand to hold screwdrivers and wrenches in the workshop; pens and scissors in your junk or desk drawer; make-up and hairbrushes in the bathroom; and paintbrushes in your studio.
- Mount **hanging shoe bags** — the kind with transparent plastic pouches — on the insides (or outsides) of doors, where they can corral plenty besides shoes: packets of dry gravy mixes, little sauce bottles, cooking utensils, silverware, cleaning supplies, scrub brushes, mittens, socks, puppets, dolls, small toys, pantyhose, rolled-up belts and scarves, lingerie, Cleopatra-scale jewelry, hammers, screwdrivers, extension cords, small jars of nails and bolts, hairbrushes, shampoo bottles, cotton balls, Q-tips... Wow!
- But, I think that the fabric, **cubbyhole-style hanging shoe bags** are even better (!), as their compartments are larger and easier to clean when grunge builds up. They can hold entire folded children’s outfits, hats, gloves, folded sweaters, household goods, toys, dolls and their wardrobes, hair dryers, toilet paper, towels, and, of course, shoes. Try them out in closets and at launching pads (see Issue 2), where they might be just great for anchoring wallets, glasses, keys, cell phones, the incoming and outgoing mail, and school papers.
- **Transparent plastic shoeboxes** are — in my opinion — very questionable for shoes, but the good news is that these sturdy, lidded boxes are super for other things. How about using some to house small toys, puzzle pieces, fancy silk scarves, greeting cards, golf balls, special mementos, or baseball cards?
- A **lazy Susan** (isn’t there a nicer name for that? a turntable?) can work wonders in a pantry, kitchen, or even inside the refrigerator for bottles of oils, vinegars, and sauces; in the laundry for stain treaters; and in a closet for cleaning products or sunscreen, insect repellent, and lotions. Double-deckers work very well with spices (alphabetized, naturally), and jars of nuts, bolts, buttons, or small office supplies. I’ve also seen large ones on family dining tables holding napkins, salt and pepper, and condiments — inspired!
- Handled, plastic **tote boxes** allow you to carry cleaning and grooming products to wherever they’re needed, craft stuff to a cozy work spot, gift-wrapping accoutrements to a cloistered place if the gifts are a secret, and letter-writing or bill-paying supplies to a table or favorite chair if you don’t have a desk space.
- Plastic-coated-wire **shelf inserts** can double the storage capacity of your kitchen or other cupboards. Just slide one in (they come in various heights, depths, and widths) and place things both on top of and under it.

- **Lingerie bags** — those zippered, mesh bags that hold “fine washables” or small items that might get lost otherwise — are great at what they do, but they can also hold drip-dry bathtub toys, dirty socks segregated by their owners, doll clothes, hair ribbons, and Duplo pieces — whether you plan to wash them or not. Heck, try storing potatoes or onions in them, or wash lettuce and vegetables in one, or use one as a dunk bag for your camping dishes. There are giant versions of these, too, for holding balls, stuffed animals, or laundry.

- **Skirt and pants hangers** — especially the multi-tiered ones — are nifty for holding tablecloths, cloth napkins, placemats, and lightweight throw rugs in a closet near where they’re used.

- Call them **plastic dishpans**, or call them **kitty litter tubs**, but call them into service all over your house! These plastic bins are really swell for wet shoes and boots, mittens and hats, toys and games with a million pieces, picture books (with the covers facing you for easy browsing), craft projects in process, cleaning supplies or towels, laundry supplies (they double as hand-washing buckets, too), hair dryers, and gear that you want in the car all the time, such as wet wipes, tissues, snacks, water bottles, and sunglasses.

What’s more, these neat tubs can be part of your **bin system** (see Issue 3), the bucket that shuttles from your launching pad to the car and back again, and the bins that catch kids’ stray stuff and return it to their rooms.

- What’s not to love about **Ziplocs?! More than mere food and household-goods storer**s — with myriad uses! — they can prevent a horrible start to your vacation if you enclose bottles of messy liquids in them inside your suitcases. Also take extra bags (in all sizes) along on trips — you never know when you’ll need one. And just when you thought that Ziplocs couldn’t get any better, they’ve created a new line of XL and XXL **“Big Bags”** — very large bags that can hold sporting goods, blankets, off-season clothes, and more.

- Likewise, the deceptively simple **‘S’ hook** can be extremely useful. Place them on rods or bars to hang backpacks, purses, umbrellas, belts, lint brushes, snow pants, jewelry, hair dryers, pots, and kitchen utensils. You can also hang tote bags on them that, in turn, hold rags, beach towels, yarn, or swim gear. (You have to love **tote bags**, too — especially if they’re pre-packed with destination-specific gear. See Issue 6.)

- The obvious contents for plastic, cardboard, wicker, or wooden **magazine holders** are magazines, but also think of them for catalogs, thin books, owner’s and instruction manuals, file folders, and construction paper.

- **Pill holders** — those little boxes with seven flip-topped compartments lettered with the days of the week — can hold pills (our memories aren’t what they used to be) and even earrings, rings, and small necklaces.

- A **tackle box** is such a marvel that it isn’t just for fishing tackle anymore. Carry your craft supplies in its little compartments, or your make-up, jewelry, hair accessories, or coin collections. Think inside the box!

- **Laundry baskets?** Laundry isn’t the half of it! Use them to store and transport large toys, balls, stuffed animals, recyclables, shoes, ski boots, or other sports gear, or let them corral stuff at your launching pad.

- Don’t forget about **milk crates**. They may no longer constitute *furniture* the way they once did, but they’re still great for books, binders, hanging files, and toys. For shelves, just stack them with their open sides out.

- And finally, **honor the brilliance** of the “lowly” plastic tub, the misfit bowl, the stray dish, the repurposed flower pot or cachepot, or the sundry box made of any material for housing so many things. For ease of handling, just make sure that the contents are visible, or the container is either transparent or well labeled.

**I’ll bet you have plenty of other favorite household lifesavers.** If you’d like to share them, I’ll pass them along. Who couldn’t use a good tip, a handy product, or a multi-tasking helper now and then? ☞

## the you’re-so-fine print

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