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Don't Go Postal! 6 Creative Ways to Tame Your Mail Mess

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Rain or shine, the mail never fails. For those of us who feel overwhelmed by the constant influx of letters, bills, and, of course, junk, it's a frightening reality.

Thankfully, there are ways to manage—and even avoid—the dreaded monstrous pile of mail.

Amy Trager, a Chicago-based certified professional organizer, offers these six creative tips for getting your mail mess under control:

1. Get Rid of Junk Mail ASAP

To keep meaningless papers from creating chaos in your home, Trager recommends getting rid of junk mail right away. "The minute you bring the mail into the house, pass by your trash or recycling can and toss in the ads and anything else you don't want to read," she says. "You'll whittle down your pile pretty quickly."

2. Store Pieces of Mail Vertically

If you don't have time to do a daily inventory of your mail, don't fret: Trager has a solution for you, too. "At least gather it into one place," she says, adding that once gathered it should be placed where each piece can sit vertically, such as in a magazine rack, letter sorter, or even a metal or plastic pocket on your wall—whatever fits your home's aesthetic.

Trager explains that storing your mail in this manner lets you easily flip through your mail, which is nearly impossible if you stack pieces on top of one another. Stacking mail, she warns, also makes it easy to forget what's on the bottom of the pile. Plus, keeping your mail in a vertical holder gives you a physical limitation—you can't keep piling things on top of it, which forces you to deal with it sooner than later.

3. Deal With Your Mail on a Regular Basis

For dealing with mail, Trager offers these two options: "You can either set time aside at regular intervals, or you can simply deal with it when your mail holder is full," she says. Regardless of how often you sit down to tackle it, Trager suggests making it as convenient as possible to do so. For instance, you may want to place your mail holder next to where you would sit down to go through it—but only if this won't prevent you from using the mail holder in the first place (i.e., if your paperwork spot is tucked away in a back room).

4. Sort by Making Three Piles

It's easy to get discouraged when you're faced with a substantial amount of mail, but Trager says you can breeze through it in no time: "Open up each piece of mail and determine if it's something that needs to be dealt with. If it doesn't require action, chances are you're either going to toss or file it away."

To keep things in order, Trager recommends making three piles:

- Things that require action
- Things to file
- Things to trash

5. Prioritize Action Items

If your schedule permits, Trager says it's best to deal with mail that requires action as soon as you've finished assembling your three piles. "Once you do this, you should be able to take what's left, trash or file it away, and start fresh with an empty mail holder," she says, conceding that this isn't always possible given distractions and tight schedules.

If you're short on time, Trager says to tackle as many to-dos as possible within the time frame you have. Whatever you do, don't worry about filing first. "To start, pay bills, respond to letters, call whomever you need to call, and do so in order of priority," she explains. "If something's urgent or really important, it should come first."

If you can get through the to-dos and the junk, Trager says you should be left with a stack of papers, such as bank statements, that need to be filed away. And if you don't have time to file, follow Trager's trick: "Place the stack near your [filing cabinet](#) so you'll be reminded to file it away soon," she says.

6. Prevent Excess Mail

Despite your best efforts, a mail mess is sure to occur if you're constantly inundated by unwanted mail. To prevent this, Trager recommends signing up on one (or more!) of the "do-not-mail" lists—which can be found via an online search—and unsubscribing from catalog lists. She also suggests doing as much bill-paying online as possible, as long as you're comfortable with it. "This can really cut down on the amount of paper you deal with," she says. "Plus, it leaves you with a helpful digital trail."

So now, go forth. Keep these tips from Trager in mind, and put an end to the mail madness for good.