

## Managing Mail to Stay Clutter-Free and Eco-Friendly

Do you have a lot of mail piling up on your kitchen counter or dining room table? Having a hard time keeping on top of bills? Is there just too many publications and paper around? Maybe you just want a more efficient system of dealing with your mail. Follow the simple steps (or some of them) below and you will have an organized and eco-friendly system in no time.

### Here are the materials that you will need:

- Basket or medium sized container to hold mail that needs attending to
- Inexpensive letter opener
- Medium (nice looking) paper shopping bag
- Decent paper shredder
- Letter holder with dividers
- Metal clamps for papers in various colors
- Labels or masking tape

First, collect mail from the mailbox (or in my case, off the floor of the foyer) and proceed to your home office area or any area where you write bills and have a filing system. If you absolutely do not have a few free moments, put the mail in a basket or container designated just for mail (I use a galvanized bucket) and proceed to the next step when you do have a moment—preferably sometime later today.

Open all mail with a letter opener (you can buy these very inexpensively at office supply stores—and they are worth it) and sort everything into these piles:

- the cut-open envelopes and superfluous inserts;
- unwanted magazines and catalogues;
- unsolicited credit card applications;
- wanted magazines and catalogues;
- Val-pak coupons;
- Redplum advertisements;
- Yellow pages directories;
- bills and their mailing envelopes;
- other important correspondence.

Now get out one of those cute small shopping bags that you've been saving (no smaller than 9"x12") and put all the cut-open envelopes and unwanted inserts into your new "recycling" shopping bag.

Catalogues, magazines and credit card applications create a lot of clutter—especially the unwanted ones. I recommend to get off mailing lists by going to the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) website and register for their free "Give Your Mailbox a Makeover" at

[www.dmachoice.org](http://www.dmachoice.org). Set up an account and request to be taken off mailing lists of various magazines, catalogues and credit card offers. (Sometimes it takes a month or two to fully process the request.) Now put the pile of unwanted catalogues and magazines in to your recycling bag (if you have a lot of these, you may need to use your larger paper recycling area.) Go and put your desired magazines and catalogues in your magazine rack. While you're there, recycle or donate any old issues of your magazines or catalogues.

While you're at your computer go to <http://www.coxtarget.com/mailexpression/s/DisplayMailSuppressionForm> to opt out of the Val-pak coupons and <http://www.valassis.com/1024/Contact/MailingListRemoval.aspx> to opt out of the Redplum advertisements and <http://www.yellowpagesgoesgreen.org/stop-yellow-pages/> to stop receiving Yellow Pages phone books. Put all these unwanted materials (except credit card applications) in the paper recycling bag or general recycling area.

OK, the next step requires a paper shredder, which is not inexpensive but is a necessary tool in this identity-theft era. Once you purchase your shredder, place it near where you open up your mail (home office or bill paying area). Shred all documents that contain your private information like your social security number. (If you are unable to afford a shredder, rip documents and then place them into two separate recycling bags.)

I recommend using a letter holder with several divided sections and some large paper clamps in different colors to hold your bills and other important correspondence. Label the letter holder divides, such as: "BILLS", "ATTEND TO" or something similar (you may use masking tape to make labels). Clamp the bills that need to be paid right away with a bright color such as red. Put these in the first divide. Review the other correspondence and jot down any action steps in your day planner (e.g.: call Bob to confirm meeting; schedule tune-up for car, etc.) File important documents in your file cabinet. Then use the other clamps for this correspondence and put them in the other divided area. See how easy this. Also, consider paying bills online. You could set up a system with an online account with your bank or pay each bill online with a credit card then just make one payment to your credit card and possibly earn reward points.

Please don't forget to put the paper shredder's contents and the "recycling" shopping bag out with other recyclables on trash day.

With these simple steps, your daily mail routine will take only moments, will keep this part of your life relatively clutter-free and will reduce the amount of paper coming into your home.

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Have your surroundings be a reflection of who you are  
or who you are becoming. . .