Home Zone: New generation label-maker cuts waste, frustration

by Linda Pescatore

If you've jumped on the label-making bandwagon to keep your files, shelves and storage containers in order, you know labels are indispensable, but they always seem to run out just when you're in the middle of an organizing frenzy.

Unfortunately, when trying out various fonts, sizes and effects such as bold, italic and foreign-language accent marks, it often takes trial and error before you get a label exactly right. Waste a few too many and you're back to sloppy handwriting using markers on paper scraps. How 1990s!

ROLL TAPE - The latest generation of LetraTag labelmakers from Dymo offer souped-up features, such as previewing text, that cut down on wasted effort. CNS Photo courtesy of Dymo Corp.The newest LetraTag Personal Labelmaker from Dymo will help cut down on the frustration and the waste of all that trial and error because it uses WYSIWYG - or "what you see is what you get" - technology that allows you to preview exactly how the label will appear before you press print.

It's a high-end feature that doesn't normally come with such an affordable price tag: LetraTag retails for $20 and LetraTag Plus, which includes two label cassettes and a magnetic holder that can attach to the refrigerator, is $30.

In fact, despite its basic-model price, the latest LetraTag offers a number of features often seen on more expensive products. For example, its nine-label memory makes it easy to print out your most frequently used labels - such as your children's names - without retyping. It also has a date function, which you can use to mark perishable items before storing in the fridge or freezer.

The compact LetraTag doesn't use ink, but uses direct thermal technology to print, so it accepts tape cassettes instead of bulky label cartridges that can cost twice as much or more. Tape refills are available in a rainbow of colors in paper, plastic, iron-on, metallic and new magnetic versions.

Despite all LetraTag's advanced features, the company says it was designed to be easy and intuitive to use. Its keyboard is set up alphabetically so even non-typists can peck characters easily.

"We want people to be able to pick it up and use it before reading the instructions," said Michael Kaplan, global marketing director of Dymo's consumer business division.

LetraTag and LetraTag Plus are sold in the office supply section of large retailers, such as Wal-Mart and Target, and in the labeling section of office supply stores.

For more information visit www.dymo.com.

PERK UP IN PINK

Whether you need an energy boost before a hectic day or want to enjoy the rich flavor of espresso after a hearty meal, you can have a delicious demitasse ready in just minutes, right in your kitchen, without the need for a bulky, expensive machine.

POUR IT ON - Fancy machinery may look impressive, but homemade espresso tastes just as good made in this authentic Italian stovetop appliance from Bialetti. Proceeds from sales of the limited-edition Dama Pink model support breast-cancer research. CNS Photo courtesy of Sur La Table.Using a method introduced in 1933, Moka Express stovetop espresso makers from Bialetti can prepare six 2-ounce cups of the intensely flavored beverage in a few minutes (a mini model dispenses just two cups, other models will make up to 12). And a portion of the $40 price for a limited-edition six-cup Dama Pink model will be donated by Bialetti to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Made in Italy, the distinctive eight-sided cast aluminum pots diffuse heat perfectly, according to the manufacturer. The Dama Pink espresso maker sports easy-grip silicone handles.

The Dama Pink and other Bialetti products - including a limited-edition pink cappuccino maker and an eight-piece pink cookware set - are available through Sur La Table stores and catalogs, or online at www.bialettishop.com and www.laprimashops.com. For more information visit www.bialetti.com.

INS AND OUTS OF OUTDOOR LIGHTS

If out on the lawn there arose such a clatter each time you've tried to get up on a ladder, you should heed these tips for stringing Christmas lights and other outdoor decorations, courtesy of the Home Depot.

- Work with a partner or two, especially when you're using that ladder. A second person can steady your ladder and hand items up to you safely.

- Only use electrical equipment such as lights and extension cords that are rated for outside use. Such items will bear red Underwriters Laboratories marks; items rated for indoor use only bear green UL marks.

- Never string more than three strands of lights together on one outlet.

- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter on each circuit. Should wires become frayed or damaged, GFCI circuits shut off automatically.

- Wrap electrical tape around light plugs wherever they meet to keep ice and water from getting in.

- Use a timer to turn lights on at dusk and off at bedtime.

- Consider illuminating wreaths, trees and other yard decor with a floodlight.

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