

Putting a label on storage and clutter

by Diana Rossetti

By now, your holiday decorations have been packed away in the attic, garage or basement for another year. Was one of your resolutions to never again have to search through 10 red-and-green plastic storage bins for that "Our First Christmas" ornament?

That is exactly the pact two Masillon, Ohio, women said they made early on the morning of Dec. 26, while waiting for Target to open. Linda Wengerd and Tracy Miller decided to buy and share a personal label maker.

IDENTIFYING THE OBVIOUS - Identifying files with labels from a personal label maker was just the beginning. Once cumbersome, today's streamlined versions, such as this Dymo LetraTag, have evolved into multi-use tools that make the quest for organization a realistic goal. Years before, the women had abandoned cardboard storage boxes in favor of heavy plastic bins with lids to store and protect their Christmas decorations. At the time, it was no small investment.

"We both wished we could get rid of them and get all new with the clear plastic so you could see what was in there," Miller said. "But that's a lot of plastic to throw away. And money."

Then they hit on the labeling idea.

So, while Target shoppers charged toward the back of the store where post-holiday deals beckoned, Wengerd and Miller headed to the office supply and stationery department.

Mulling over their choices, the friends finally decided on a battery-operated Dymo label maker. It prints paper, plastic, metallic, magnetic and iron-on fabric labels. All that plus English, French and Spanish options.

Simple to operate and reasonably priced, the label maker is one of several makes and models available at office supply outlets as well as department stores. Daily, domestic engineers come up with new uses for their labelers to better organize their homes.

By now, the friends probably have come up with some of their own.

The following, a host of practical and clever uses:

HOME OFFICE

- Identify related files with specific label tape colors.

- Catch the scissors snatcher red-handed when you identify the office pair as such.

KITCHEN

- Weary of reaching for the turkey you were going to use for packed lunches today and discovering someone made a midnight snack of it? Put the kibosh on lunch poachers simply by labeling key foods "Yes," which means go ahead and eat it, or "No," which means hands off. And if you think the only way that dessert you saved from dinner for a late-night treat is going to be there when you want it, why, there's yet another reason to label. In this case, "Not a chance, Buster."

- Do covered-dish suppers often cost you containers? Print out a label and stick it on the outside of your favorite casserole.

LAUNDRY - Help the family help with laundry. Label detergents with your own messages, such as "White cotton only," "Use with cold water only" or "Wait until rinse cycle begins."

GARAGE

- Cut down on chore time by printing a label for any container you can't see through.

- Do you have an antsy youngster? Give him or her that mayonnaise jar of screws and ask him to sort them for you. Then label smaller jars so you won't have to do it again.

KIDS - How many orphaned mittens do you need? Print out cloth labels and, instead of ironing them on the inside of a knitted garment, just use needle and thread to tack down each end of the label.

- If the entire swim team has matching towels, set your little Olympian's apart from the rest with an iron-on name tag on the corner. The same goes for backpacks.

- Summer camp requires clothing with the owner's name on it. Rather than fight with permanent fabric marking pens, which sometimes bleed, opt for a fabric iron-on name label. Punch in the name, print it out, iron it on. - Did Amy leave her "Sesame Street" DVD at the sitter's? You will know for sure if you personalize it.

- Scrapbooking is the perfect partner for a personal label maker. Get artsy with boxes and shadowed typefaces.

- Teach reading and orderliness at the same time by labeling drawers according to their contents.

ET CETERA

- No need to buy pricey printed bookplates. Just print a label and stick it on the flyleaf of books you lend.

- If you keep special jewelry pieces in their original boxes, label them and cut down your "find" time.

- Take a moment to label light switches and circuit breakers.

- How many times have you hesitated before grabbing your ski boots from a row of similar-looking ones stuffed under a chalet bench? Stick on plastic labels and solve that problem.

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