

**Question: I have photos stuffed in every crack and crevice of my house. I was hoping to organize them this summer. Where should I begin?**

Few items are more treasured than photographs. They're all we really have from the past, and they keep our memories intact. Organizing pictures allows us to both protect them and access them. I liken it to herding cattle: you need to round 'em up, fence 'em in, tag 'em, and get ready for more.

Your goal in organizing photos is twofold: keep them safe, and find them when necessary. An easy set-up that allows for growth is ideal. The best news about organizing photos is that any system is better than none, and it doesn't have to be perfect.

**Round 'em up:** Begin by gathering your photos. Collect them from every drawer, cupboard, box and bin. Find the stacks of loose photos forgotten on a shelf and piled in your desk. Gather the ones from the garage and closets. I consider memorabilia, like kids' art, and awards and ribbons, in the same category as photos, so rope those in as well. If nothing else, your photos are now all together, and that's an important first step.

**Corral 'em:** Choose a place to store your photos. Consider a fairly large location, such as a closet or large cupboard or under a bed. Most of us have far more photos than we think, so give them as much space as possible. Consider a location close to an exit so you can quickly grab them in an emergency. Avoid locations like attics or basements where temperature changes and moisture can ruin your precious memories.

**Box 'em in:** Decide how you'd like to store your photos: lots of small boxes or a few large bins? Simple photo albums or elaborate scrapbooks? Whatever your ultimate goal, start with a number of acid and lignin free boxes. They can be purchased at any craft or scrapbook store. Sort your pictures into general categories. I think sorting chronologically (by year or date) makes the most sense, but other options include sorting by family member (John's box, Jamie's box) or by category (Travel, Holidays). Pictures don't need to be in perfect order, just generally in the right box.

**Brand 'em:** Clearly label each box with its contents. Write dates and events on picture envelopes or use index cards to separate photo groups, if desired. Ink, lead, tape and sticky notes can damage photos, so be sure to write on the container, not the actual picture. If space is an issue, consider discarding all the envelopes; you'll reduce your inventory by at least half.

**Send 'em outback:** Feel free to throw away any picture that is overexposed, blurry or makes you look fat (hey, there has to be some benefit to all this effort!). Toss doubles in a box and let your family members split them up.

**Keep 'em safe:** We have many options for safeguarding our memories. The most simple is to separate your negatives from your photos, and then store them with a relative or close friend. You can also make a digital copy of your photos and store them on disc or on a server. There are great companies like ScanCafe ([www.scancafe.com](http://www.scancafe.com)) that will upload all your photos for online access.

**Book 'em:** If the desire to put your pictures into albums is nipping at your heels, then choose archival quality scrapbooks and insert the photos whenever you get a free moment. Photo albums, whether wildly decorated or simply filled, make outstanding family treasures. If you take time to journal your thoughts about certain photos, they are even more precious.

Organizing photos is high on everyone's "when I get time" list. Perusing your beautifully created scrapbooks while sitting 'round the campfire is ideal, but simply knowing they are roughly sorted and safely stored is certainly good enough. The goal is peace of mind, not perfection. If this is the summer to organize your pictures, then giddy up! You can round 'em up and fence 'em in before the sun sets tonight.

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