

# Go Ahead, Make a Mess

“Controlled sprawling” boosts your productivity without driving resident neatniks over the edge. **BY SANDY MAYNARD**

If you are like many ADDers, you like having your work sprawled out in front of you. For a primarily visual learner, being able to see everything at the same time is key to staying engaged with the project.

Sprawling may be fine if you live alone, but, for the sprawler who shares living space with a non-sprawler, this style of working may cause conflicts.

First, classify areas in your home by the following categories:

- **Sprawl Space:** off limits to the non-sprawler.
- **Non-sprawl space:** off limits to the sprawler.
- **Shared Space:** sprawler can work here, but must straighten up between sprawl sessions.

Once you're clear on where you can and cannot sprawl to your heart's content, consider these ways to maximize your sprawl space, and sprawl and un-sprawl quickly and easily.

## Sprawling space setup

**1** If you can take over an entire corner of a room, consider purchasing an L-shaped desk. These come in all configurations—with or without file cabinets, supply drawers, and extensions to add space to either side. Place your computer screen in the corner. Then, if you're right-handed, use the right side of the desk for items that you need within reach at all times, such as your phone and inbox. Sprawl away on the left side of the desk.

**2** Use a retractable keyboard tray whenever possible. This leaves you with even more desk space.

**3** Install shelving to get as many things OFF your workspace as possible. Store “project baskets” (see #1 on page 56) on 12-inch wide shelves hung high up on the wall. Mount narrower shelves below for items that you use often, but don't want to sacrifice desk space to: stapler, tape dispenser, etc. (See “Customize your sprawl space” at right for retailers.)

**4** Some desks/work tables come with adjustable legs. Make use of this feature to double your surface area. Attach gliders to the feet of a card table. Then raise the desktop high enough to slide the table underneath. Simply pull the table out when you need more surface area.



### CUSTOMIZE YOUR SPRAWL SPACE

The L-shaped desk above is part of the Galant series from Ikea ([www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)). Shelving systems and other organizational items that can be configured to meet your needs may also be found at:

- >> [www.easyclosets.com](http://www.easyclosets.com)
- >> [www.elfa.com](http://www.elfa.com)
- >> [www.containerstore.com](http://www.containerstore.com)
- >> [www.shelving.com](http://www.shelving.com)
- >> [www.rubbermaid.com](http://www.rubbermaid.com)

**5** Commandeer the closet closest to your sprawl space. Use this space for storing an extra pull-out table or your larger project containers.

When you have enough room, it's easy to designate adequate “off-limits” sprawl space. If you're dealing with space limitations, it may mean that you work in shared areas, where the aftermath of your sprawl is not appreciated. This doesn't mean that you can't sprawl, just that you must learn to leave no trace of your sprawl behind.

**A cautionary tale...**

Don't use your project container for any non-project items. Here's what happened to one of my clients: She intended to look through a bag filled with summer camp brochures during her son's soccer game. On her way out, she checked the mail, and shoved it in with the camp stuff. She spent the game catching up with an old friend and didn't look through the bag. When she got home, the dog needed to go out, so she stashed the bag back into her sprawl closet. A month later she got an overdue notice for the electric bill. How did she miss it? When it was deadline time for camp applications she grabbed her camp project bag—and guess what she found?

Let's face it—cleaning up and putting things away are boring tasks, and it's all too easy to find something else you'd rather be doing. As soon as the phone rings or something else grabs your attention, the sprawl stays right where it is. I recommend that “put-away” time take less than two minutes to reduce the ADDer's “margin of distraction.” Here's how to make that happen:

**Sprawling and unsprawling with ease**

**1** Each current project—college applications, a vacation scrapbook, research on potential home improvements—should have its own container, whether it's a milk crate, document case, canvas bag, shoe box, or special drawer. The project can then be quickly scooped up and “containerized” to be brought back to your closet, off-limits sprawl space, or any other designated storage area.

**2** Label your project containers. Make sure that the labels are easy to read and clearly visible when the container is out of use in your closet or on your shelf. Use removable labels so that you can reuse the container for another project.

**3** Place project buckets and boxes on sliders and gliders. They are great for larger project con-

tainers, as they eliminate the back-breaking effort of lugging a heavy container back to a closet.

**4** Set a timer to go off five minutes before you need to wrap up. Because you've reduced your “put-away” time to two minutes, this should be just enough time to scoop up what you have been working on, toss it in a container, take it to a closet, storage area, or non-shared space, and leave the house or move on to your next activity.

**5** Taking storage space and clean-up time into account, limit the number of projects you can work on at the same time. This may be four for one person and two for another, so give this one some thought. Ask yourself, “How many projects can I sprawl and un-sprawl comfortably and easily?”

Sprawling need not be an activity that you have to give up to keep peace in the family. Yes, there will be times when you get interrupted and the sprawl gets left where it is. But if you have a plan to put it away in under two minutes (OK, some “super” sprawls may take five), no problem—you can do it while your tea is microwaving!

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