

file, answer, or toss

Marion MacDonald

Three-Step System

It's never too late to be an organized Extension agent. So, I took three steps to make my files more useful. If you'd like to try it, here's what to do. **FIRST**—decide on a pattern for your files. Keep like activities together. For example, keep all organizations in the same drawer—current materials in one folder, references in another. **SECOND**—prepare a master list for each drawer. Keep this on stiff cardboard in the front of the drawer. Add or delete listings as you revise your system. This master list saves both you and your secretary time. **THIRD**—use your files daily. Allow time after meetings and events to sort materials, note changes, and toss out junk.

Every time you go through your mail, *FILE*, *ANSWER*, or *TOSS*. Look at your desk right now—how much are you saving for a decision tomorrow? Don't put it off. You'll save time if you decide right now what to do with that letter.

The work file is an answer for those who have activities, contests, and programs that are repeated every year. In my situation, secretarial turnover and too little office space make it difficult to efficiently keep track of score sheets and entry forms. My work file consists of 14 folders, 1 for each month of the year, plus 1 for leaders' newsletters and 1 for 4-H newsletters. During and after each activity, I sort the forms, information sheets, and score cards. Then I file them in the work file, with a due date at least two weeks before they'll be needed next year.

Work File

Following an event, I note desired changes on the copy and indicate about how many forms were used. In the case of forms that don't change from year to year, I usually have a two-year supply run off and make a note that stencils were saved. Any job that will be repeated next year goes into this file, including ribbon orders, trophy orders, and funding requests . . . to name just a few. I note some of these jobs on a file card, with a reminder on where the reference materials for them are kept.

Having a place for all your materials helps you feel more organized. To make it work, you have to set aside the time. But believe me, it's worth the effort. Sure has given me a new outlook. I don't feel bogged down anymore.

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