

FEATURES



A shaggy throw rug made from recycled sheet scraps. —AP photos



This undated photo provided by Sadie Seasongoods shows a silverware organizer made into a jewelry holder.



This undated photo provided by Fiskars shows cupcake holders which look like flowers, being used as a great way to customize standard string lights.



Photo provided by Target shows a door storage device.



Recycled old magazine pages used to frame a cork board.



Photo shows Room Essentials XL twin sheets that have a handy built-in pocket to stash phones, notepads, etc for students who draw the lofted bed in the dorm room, the feature saves climbing up and down to reach a nightstand.



Photo provided by Target shows a scenic tapestry.

Dorm Decor Hacks: Fun ideas to add flair to the basic box

Moving into a dorm is one of college life's most exciting milestones; it's the first time many kids are living away from the comfy confines of home. But the thrill can wane when the dormitory door opens. Most dorm rooms are pretty basic, with plain furniture and institutional floors and walls. So how do you take a room from spartan to snazzy when most of the budget is going to meal plans and books? "No matter how small and cramped your dorm room may be, you can still find cute ways to store all your stuff - without spending a ton on organizers and decor," says Seventeen magazine editor Kristin Koch.

She and stylist Sarah Newell suggest creating a floating shelf out of a magazine file box, and turning clear plastic paint cans into storage for hair accessories or school supplies. Repurposing and rethinking are the keys to good hacks. Tikva Morrow is editor in chief at Hometalk.com, a New York-based do-it-yourself home and garden website. She says it's tempting to load up on kitschy decor, but that's a budget sucker.

Colorful tape

"DIY some pretty embellishments of your own instead," she suggests. "Bring along a few rolls of washable tape for wall decor and picture displays, and make a few large prints for walls." Decorative tape and fabric can also be used to jazz up shelving and built-ins. Is that your roommate's laptop charger, or yours? Identify the cords and accessories by wrapping them with colorful tape, advises stylist and HGTV.com contributor Michelle Edgemont. She also suggests adding the tape to a plain Jane table, or closet door. Look online for instructions on how to make no-sew or simple-sew pillows with old T-shirts or sweaters.

"Cute throw pillows are easy to make, and even a headboard can be DIY-ed using a large piece of cardboard, some fabric and a hot glue gun," Morrow says. Shower stall caddies can be hung on a door or wall to corral loose items, says Gurl.com's Jessica Booth. And organization blogger Laura Wittman of Alberta, Canada, says shower-curtain rings can turn ordinary hangers into scarf and belt organizers. Or use the rings to hang fabric or curtains over existing dorm blinds, personalizing your windows. Dorm floors are pretty institutional, but students don't want to spend on nice rugs that will get lots of wear and tear. On Hometalk.com, Brooke Bock of Tyrone, Pennsylvania, shares how she made a shaggy throw rug using a piece of non-slip rug matting and

recycled sheet scraps. On the same site, Sarah Ramberg of Simpsonville, South Carolina, contributed the idea of turning a silverware tray into a jewelry holder using paint, stencils and cup hooks.

they're almost impossible to nail or screw into, plus you don't want to get in trouble for marking them up," Ma says. Consider a colorful tapestry or a mural photo-printed with a "view": a city at night, a scene from some far-



A custom faux flower bouquet made out of Post-it Notes, and can be used to pretty up a drab dorm space.

Extra sticky notepads

A silverware tray tucked into a drawer makes good hideaway storage for keys, ID cards, sunglasses and electronics. Design duo Zest It Up in Atascadero, California, suggests creating an artsy, no-maintenance indoor garden by painting smooth rocks and planting them as faux cacti in a cool pot. In many dorms, beds are on lofts over desks or storage areas, says Target stylist (and recent UCLA graduate) Tiffany Ma. She recommends using Target's Room Essentials Micro Fiber Sheets with side pockets: "It's like having your own floating nightstand to hold your phone, tablet, book or glasses. You can get your exercise walking to class, instead of climbing up and down from your bunk."

The retailer's also got an over-the-door, full-length mirror with built-in organizer. "There's nothing more boring than the typical cinder-block dorm-room wall -



Photo provided by Zest It Up shows painted rocks that resemble cacti.

away land, a serene nature-scape. Attach the cloth with non-marking adhesive strips.

When you're doing the school-supply run, grab some extra sticky notepads. Pinterest is full of ideas for wall art made with the sticky notes. And instructions for crafting decorative flowers are at www.post-it.com. Or create a framed corkboard or mirror using rolled-up magazine pages and Mod Podge. Using a paper punch, turn metallic or paper cupcake holders into frilly foils for string lights; Los Angeles designer Emma Jeffery shows you how at www.fiskars.com. — AP



Photos provided by The New York Botanical Garden shows kids take part in gardening inside the Family Garden at The New York Botanical Garden in New York. — AP



When summer ends, kids' ties to nature don't have to

The start of the school year doesn't have to mean the end of time outdoors. Many parents, teachers and schools are finding ways to keep kids connected to nature all year. "It may be even more important for kids to be connected to nature during the school year than just in the summer," says Richard Louv, author of the new "Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life" (Algonquin Books) and the best-selling "Last Child in the Woods" (Algonquin, 2008). "Amid all the focus on technology, we've been missing something quite elemental," Louv says. Just a walk through an urban park, he says, can help kids' performance in school. "I can't tell you how many times teachers who bring their classes into natural settings say that the troublemaker in class is the very one that turns out to have leadership qualities in the woods," he says.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler, executive director of the Children and Nature Network, a Minneapolis-based non-profit, says that getting kids connected to nature doesn't have to mean a major outing. "There is something about natural environ-

ments that is really stress-reducing," she says, "even if it's just 10 minutes a day in a neighborhood park or planting a pollinator garden." Many botanical gardens, parks and nature centers offer after-school and weekend programs, and are helping schools bring environmental awareness into the classroom, too.

Regional identity

Schools in Mamaroneck, New York, for example, have worked with a local nature preserve in the last few years to get kids from preschool to high school outside for science, says the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum, Annie Ward. "I know we're in a time of standards, and so forth, but how do we help kids grow up with a sense of place, of regional identity?" she says. "Especially now, with all these issues being talked about - the rise of technology, of kids being hyper-scheduled - there's particular power in being outside, in being close, careful observers of the natural world. There's a

sense of calm and a sense of being unplugged."

Naturalists come to school and prepare kids and teachers for field trips, Ward says. Third-graders go to a nearby Long Island Sound beach to learn about tidal ecosystems. Fifth graders take pond samples to study under microscopes. High school students in an advanced placement environment class helped to remove invasive plants from a meadow at the preserve. Nationally, a federal program, Every Kid in the Park, offers free admission to national parks and other public lands to the families of all fourth graders. And many schools are beginning to realize the value of green schoolyards or gardens. "Schools are public lands accessible to children, and too often the yards consist of a blacktop that's locked up at night," says Milligan-Toffler.

An aquarium or terrarium

Louv's latest book outlines ways that families can advocate for more green space in schools and form networks of families

interested in getting outdoors. Particularly for older kids, he notes, outings are more enticing if their peers go too. For parents looking for places to go as a family, Nature Rocks, a program of the Nature Conservancy, has a website where you plug in your location and the weather, and it will list ideas. The Children and Nature Network also lists on its website groups interested in getting outdoors.

Louv notes that kids don't need to come inside just because of cold or rain; they just need to dress accordingly. In winter, he suggests, carry a fold-up magnifying glass to examine snowflakes; build igloos or snow forts; or go sledding or snowshoeing. And even when kids are stuck indoors, they can start a windowsill garden, or put together an aquarium or terrarium. "It isn't about going back to nature, but forward," he says. — AP