



THE SUNDAY TIMES

HOME

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HOW TO...

ORGANISE YOUR LAUNDRY ROOM

Laundry and utility rooms can be a source of enormous irritation — the steam, the noise, the insufficient storage, the wellies dumped there by the rest of the family, the dirt, the dog basket — or they can be a haven of calm where you retreat for some quiet ironing and Radio 4. If yours is vexing, it's worth giving it an overhaul, because there is a laundry list of small changes that can quickly improve its appeal and efficiency.

WALLS

Make sure the paintwork is up to the job. A laundry room will become humid, with steam from the iron and damp from drying clothes, so you should be using moisture-resistant paint marketed for kitchens and bathrooms. Dulux has a Bathroom+ range (from £10 a litre) and Little Greene does an eco-friendly Intelligent Eggshell (£59 for 2½ litres); if those are too expensive, check out the own-brand ranges at DIY stores.

FLOORING

Flooring needs to be fit for purpose, too. As in the bathroom and the kitchen, carpet isn't ideal. If you have Downton delusions, go the whole flagstone hog. Otherwise, ceramic tiles are perfectly serviceable and, as the area will be quite small, this is an opportunity to treat yourself to something special. If you fancy pattern, there's the funky British Tile Collection, from WorkHouse (from £119 a sq metre), or Bert & May's colourful geometric encaustics. Plain options from Fired Earth include Quarry White and Grey Terracotta (£67.40 a sq metre in the summer sale). Rubber or vinyl flooring, in a neutral or snazzy colour or a pattern, will give a contemporary lift to your laundry room's decor: try Harvey Maria or the Colour Flooring Company (from £28 a sq metre) for designer options, Homebase and Carpetright for budget.

STORAGE

This should be tailored to the way you use the room. Do you need a linen press for dry towels and bedding, or just cupboard space for the impedimenta of laundry:

soap powder, ironing water? Is yours also a depot for cleaning products? If so, a secure cupboard for bleach and dishwasher tablets will be invaluable. A common complaint is that, amid generous storage space, many households lack a closet tall enough to take an ironing board and brooms. If you don't have a full-height cupboard, it's worth paying a carpenter to build one. A good spot is in the dead space alongside the washing machine: if there's enough depth, the same closet can accommodate a stespladder and a folding clothes airer.



There's also plenty of good "off the shelf" storage. Ikea has an ingenious approach to household organisation, as does Lakeland. The Elfa range, from Store, is a collection of racks, ventilated shelving and baskets that can be customised to your needs. A utility-room set costs £241 in the website's summer sale (aplaceforeverything.co.uk).

THE KIT

Once storage is sorted, consider whether your drying kit needs upgrading. Clothes airers, if you buy the more attractive wooden options, tend to become mildewed with age, so review and replace them regularly.

The most beautiful are the birch extending clothes dryer from Garden Trading (left; £145) and the lovely retro Laundry Maid from deVol (below; £265), but Lakeland's heated tower airer (£110), part of the bestselling Dry:Soon range, has its fans.

SOUNDPROOFING

Noise can be an issue in the laundry room. Some spin cycles are loud enough to interfere with listening to the radio in the kitchen next door. Rather than investing in soundproofing for the room (though you could replace the door with a more substantial one, or hang a curtain on the kitchen side), check out the new, quieter appliances on offer. John Lewis sells a range with Quiet Mark certification.

LOCATION

Finally, if you are starting from scratch or working on a refurbishment, and have the option of putting your laundry room wherever you please, consider having it upstairs. This may not be the traditional location, but time and again I am told how much it smooths the running of a household. Dirty laundry is

generated upstairs, in the form of discarded clothes and bed linen, so the trip to the washing machine is shorter and laundry becomes more of a pleasure and less of a chore.

COMPROMISES

What if you haven't the luxury of a dedicated room at home? In defiance of Kirstie Allsopp's recent edict, the "laundry room" in smaller flats is usually an integrated washing machine within a compact kitchen. Here, there may still be some outdoor space where you can hang washing to dry. A rotary clothes line can leave your washing smelling much fresher than tumble drying; inexpensive options are available from chains such as Argos and Wilko.

In the absence of even a balcony, you may have to resort to one of those airers that hang from the shower head or perch over the bath (Lakeland's foldable over-bath deluxe model costs £22). Or outsource the whole business with Laundrapp (from £2 an item, or £11 for five shirts; laundrapp.com).

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