

FEATURE MATERIAL
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Create a Clothing-Friendly Basement Closet

No question about it. Most of us have huge amounts of “stuff” and we’re always looking for more places to put it. With closets on the main living floors of the house packed to overflowing, the search for more storage space often leads to the basement, where there are large expanses just waiting to be filled up.

But even relatively dry basements can be chilly and damp, leaving clothing, sporting goods and other valued possessions vulnerable to damage from mold, mildew and insects. Textile specialists recommend that clothing be stored in an environment where temperatures and humidity levels are most like those of the main floor living spaces.

Construction pros point out that it’s possible to create a clothing-friendly storage closet in a basement with intelligent planning and careful selection of building materials. Remodeling contractor Jeff Zupan offered these tips:

Address dampness issues as the first step in a basement renovation project so that flooding, mold or musty odors won’t ruin your investment or your clothing. Get a qualified professional to identify the source of any water problems, including seasonal seepage, and prescribe a fix. Install a sump pump, use a dehumidifier and install proper ventilation for adequate air exchange.

The foundation of your closet should be a subfloor that will provide insulating value and keep closet contents away from the cold, damp concrete. Zupan suggests

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DRIcore, a modular subfloor (www.dricore.com) system that snaps together easily. With its raised design and integral moisture barrier, this relatively new product is designed specifically to manage moisture and prevent musty odors in basement environments.

Think cedar. Along with the trend toward elaborate closet organization systems and other creature comforts, Zupan says that aromatic cedar is once again becoming a popular option for closet interiors. He points out that a century ago great-grandma knew that cedar offered excellent protection against the moths that chewed holes in the family's best woolsens.

There are ample reasons to explain cedar's renewed popularity – a desire to protect our investment in fine clothing, an increasing use of natural fabrics such as wool and silk and a preference for using natural substances to repel pests instead of more toxic and foul-smelling chemical options.

For a closet being built in an otherwise unfinished basement, begin by installing good quality insulation against the masonry walls, one that will not trap moisture in the space between the masonry wall and the finished wall. Zupan then frames in the space with studs and uses ¾-inch tongue-and-groove aromatic cedar planks for the walls. He emphasizes that only Eastern red cedar has the distinctive aroma that is so appealing to humans, but that repels bugs. For basements with finished walls, he installs the cedar on top of the drywall.

Seal the closet tightly by installing an exterior door that has weatherstripping. Most people don't realize that a cedar closet's effectiveness depends on a tight seal that allows the cedar aroma to build up to levels that are inhospitable to bugs, Zupan says.

And finally, Zupan suggests, “**make your closet as big as you can** because you'll always fill it up. Invariably, my customers tell me ‘I wish we would have made it bigger...’”

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