

By Design

Multipurpose Laundry Rooms

by Elaine Laney

Every house needs a washer and dryer. Far too often, though, these essential appliances are jammed into a 3x5 closet that's optimistically called a laundry. This uses minimal space, but it certainly doesn't make doing laundry any easier. I'd rather wash clothes in a pot of boiling water over a wood fire in the backyard.

Given the opportunity, I like to incorporate the washer and dryer into a mudroom — a multipurpose transition space between the home and the outside world. The laundry-mudroom provides the home's inhabitants with a place to drop off and organize items that don't belong in the living space, and pick them up again on the way out the door. It can also serve as a computer area or a space for sewing or other hobbies. All this helps banish clutter and makes for contented clients.

Location and Size

In a house with an attached garage,

the laundry-mudroom should lie between the door to the garage and the kitchen. A relatively long, narrow plan is often best, because it encourages an efficient, assembly-line style of handling materials. It's easier to put things away in the right place if you're passing within an arm's length of the right place, rather than having to take a few steps out of the way. A width of about 8 feet works well, because it allows room for 2-foot cabinets on each side with ample passage space between for two people (see Figure 1).

Adding a half bath. If space permits, the far end of a mudroom is an ideal place for a half bath, or better yet, a half bath with a shower. That permits muddy soccer players or gardeners to clean up without tracking dirt through the house. This bathroom is a utilitarian, family-only space, not a showpiece for guests. Basic fixtures and a simple 3x3 shower stall are all that's needed.

Managing laundry flow. Placing the washer and dryer in the mudroom also means that dirty work clothes (and play clothes) can go directly into the wash, with no need to carry them through the house on the way. Although that's convenient, it does have a downside: It means that laundry has to be carried through the kitchen on its way to and from the washer. For washing small items, I sometimes create a space for a stacked washer and dryer in the bedroom area, usually next to the linen closet. Two separate washers and dryers may seem extravagant, but it's a minor cost in the context of a new \$500,000 house, and many clients find the added convenience well worth it.

Clutter Table

An essential item in an efficient mudroom is a centrally located "clutter table" (or countertop) that provides a temporary resting place

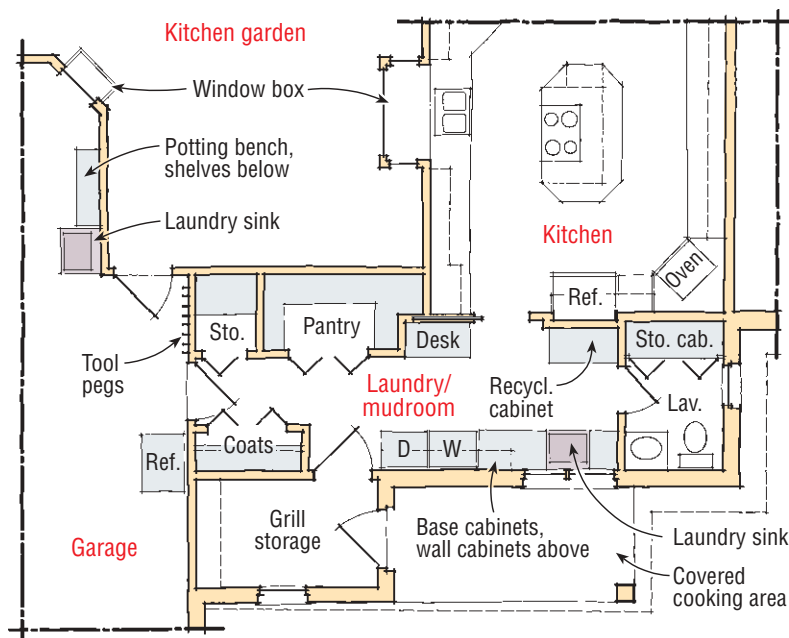


Figure 1. In this house, designed for a gardener client, a built-in potting bench in the three-car garage provides a convenient work space and storage for tools. The mudroom itself includes a desk, plenty of storage, and a large pantry.

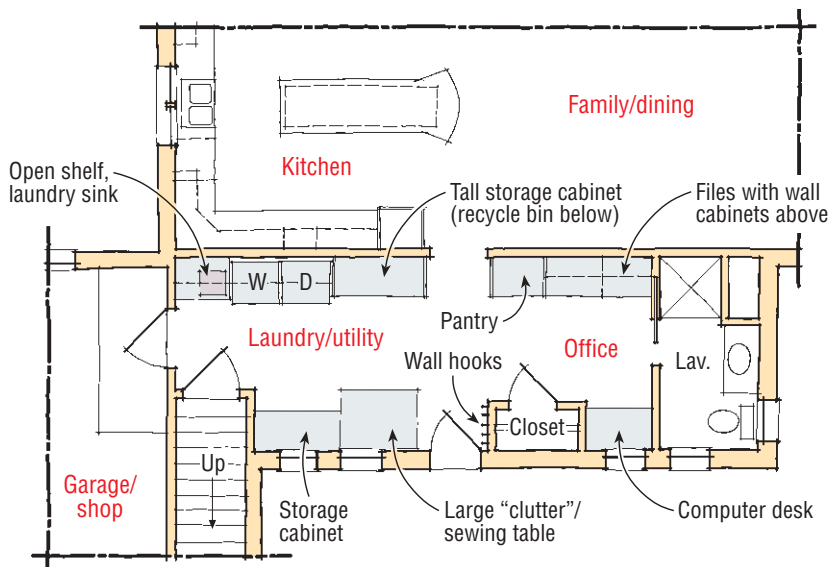


Figure 2. The retired professionals who live in this house use the large “clutter table” for mail, keys, and other articles. The wife occasionally clears it off and uses it as a sewing table. Many of the clutter-table items go directly to the attached office instead of going into the house first; junk mail goes straight into the recycling bin next to the dryer. The husband tinkers in the garage shop and keeps some clean clothes in the closet by the back door so he can shower before going into the house.

for mail, the newspaper, bags of groceries, backpacks, and other inbound items (Figure 2). This makes for quick and efficient sorting: Nonrefrigerated foods get put away on pantry shelves until they’re needed in the kitchen, coats get hung on hooks, and junk mail goes directly into the recycling bin.

Cabinets. As with the half bath, mudroom storage doesn’t need to be fancy. I often specify simple laminate-surfaced cabinets from one of the big-box building suppliers. Wall-hung cabinets above the washer and dryer are convenient for storing laundry supplies, while base cabinets provide counters for sorting laundry with space beneath for drawers or bulk storage.

Custom Modifications

Those general guidelines are a good starting point, but for best results, take your client’s pastimes and activities into account when planning the mudroom. Families with small children might benefit from a lot of low storage space for toys or sports equipment, along with both high and low coat hooks. Gardeners might want a place to pot seedlings and store small gardening items, while sports enthusiasts might want storage for golf clubs or tennis rackets. If your clients are pet lovers, consider adding a built-in dog bed or cat-litter tray (Figure 3). A few low-cost enhancements like these can make a big difference in the homeowners’ sense of how well the house works for them.

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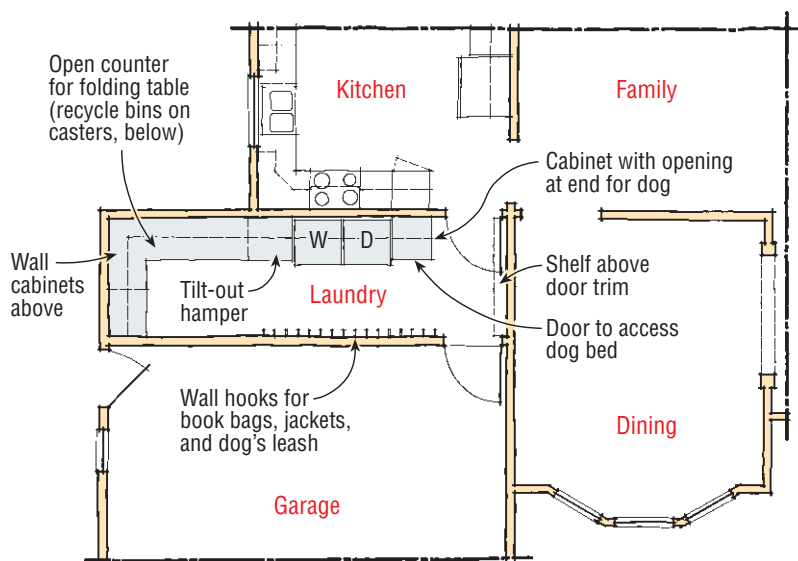


Figure 3. The owners’ small dog sleeps in a bed beneath the cabinet to the left of the door; her food and water go under the counter at far left. Hooks provide an easy way for kids to keep track of their own stuff, while the counter provides a convenient space to work on school projects.