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THE UNCHANGEABLE HOME

MEASURE FIRST

Japanese order for a home you can't change

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Chapter 1. What Japan Actually Does

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01

CHAPTER

WHAT JAPAN ACTUALLY DOES

Four things the internet says about Japanese homes, checked against Japanese sources.

About this chapter. World Tested is a research channel. The woman in the videos is an AI-generated character. The research is not: every claim below has a source, listed at the end of the chapter.

There is a Japan that exists mostly on YouTube.

In that Japan, every kitchen is bamboo and cast iron. Nobody owns a plastic box. Everyone was born knowing where the scissors go, and the grandmothers invented a five-step organizing system some time before the printing press.

It's a lovely place. It's also not real, and following its advice is how people end up with a drawer full of organizers that don't fit anything.

So before the rest of this book tells you what to do, this chapter does something the videos usually skip. It checks. Four popular claims about Japanese homes, each one against a Japanese survey, a Japanese publication or an international report. Where the claim holds, you'll see why. Where it doesn't, you'll see what's true instead — and what that means for your own shelves.

One more thing. We checked a fifth claim and couldn't find a source good enough to stand behind. It's at the end, with the reason it isn't here.

Myth 1. Japanese homes don't use plastic

The claim. Japanese households store food in glass, cook on iron, and keep their closets in woven baskets. Plastic is a Western habit.

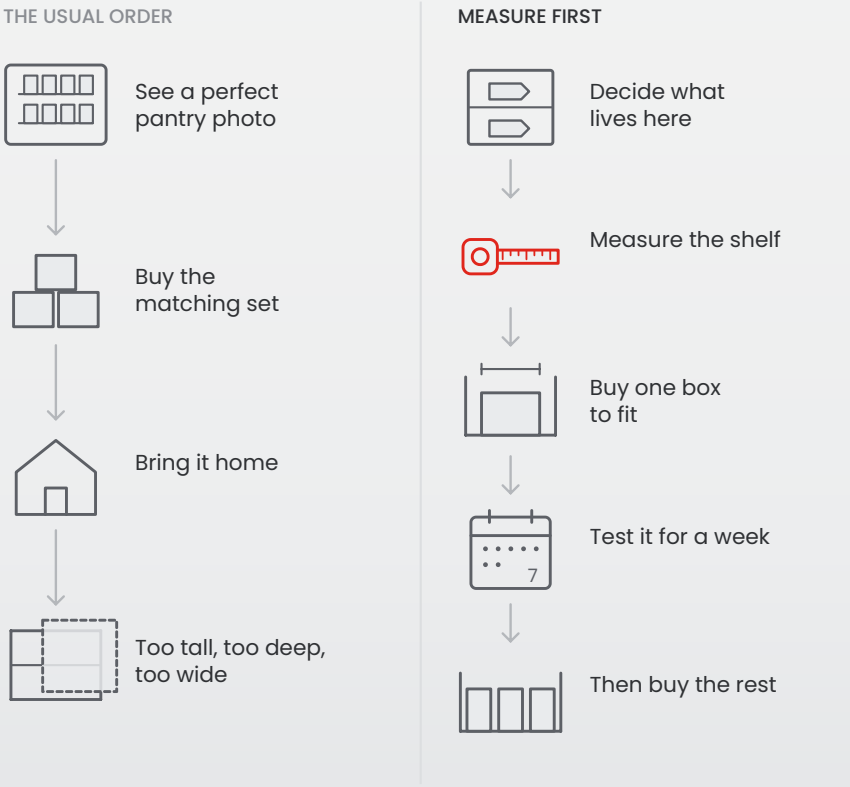
What's actually true. Among the world's largest economies, only one produces more plastic packaging waste per person than Japan: the United States. That's from the UN Environment Programme's 2018 report on single-use plastics, which compares the US, China, the EU, Japan and India. Japan comes second — ahead of the EU, ahead of China.

And the famously neat Japanese drawer? Look closely at one. In a 2024 roundup of fourteen storage ideas in *Sankyu!* — one of Japan's biggest home magazines — almost every container comes from Daiso, Seria, MUJI or Nitori. The very first example is a MUJI polypropylene box that happens to fit packs of natto exactly. Not bamboo. Not ceramic. A plastic box from a chain store.

The frying pans tell the same story. A 2022 survey of 737 Japanese households asked people to rate the pans they own. The one used most was a T-fal. The one people were happiest with was a Thermos. The one rated best for food not sticking was a Doshisha Evercook. All three are non-stick coated.

A Japanese viewer put it plainly under one of those "Japanese kitchen" videos: older cooks may season an iron pan for years, but younger people are too busy, so they use non-stick.

What this means for your home. Plastic boxes were never the problem. The Japanese kitchen is full of them. What's different is the order of operations — the box is bought *after* the shelf is measured, and it's bought to fit that shelf to the millimetre.



Same boxes. A different order.

There's a word for it: **シンデレラフィット**, "Cinderella fit." A container that slides into its space as if it were made for it. You can't get one by shopping first. Chapter 2 is about how you get one on purpose.

Myth 2. Japanese people are naturally tidy

The claim. Order is cultural in Japan. People are raised with it. Clutter is something that happens elsewhere.

What's actually true. In December 2024, a Japanese research company surveyed 4,000 people about tidying their homes. **62.7% said they were "not very good" or "bad" at it.** More than half — 55.1% — said their home was not well organized.

Their reasons will sound familiar. The top one was simply that it's a hassle (44.8%). The second was that they couldn't bring themselves to throw things away (40.7%). The hardest things to deal with were clothes, everyday items, and things with sentimental value.

A smaller survey in June 2026 found that **83.7%** of Japanese respondents feel some burden when it comes to tidying and cleaning their home. 41% said they simply had too many things to sort out alone.

And the most famous book on tidying ever written — Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* — was first published in Japan, in 2010, for Japanese readers. A tidying consultant only has a career where homes need tidying.

What this means for your home. Nobody is born organized — not there, not here. The difference in a small Japanese apartment isn't character. It's that there's no spare room to hide the overflow in, so the system has to work or the flat stops working.

That's good news if you rent. A home you can't expand is exactly the condition that made these methods necessary in the first place.

Myth 3. Nobody in Japan uses plastic wrap

The claim. Japanese kitchens cover leftovers with a plate, a cloth or a wooden lid. Cling film is a wasteful Western shortcut.

What's actually true. Japan's two big cling film brands, Saran Wrap and Kure Wrap, both launched in 1960. By 2018, household wrap in Japan was a market of about ¥50 billion a year, and those two brands held roughly 80% of it between them.

Two brands, launched the same year, still splitting four-fifths of the market nearly six decades later. That isn't a niche habit.

What this means for your home. If a video tells you to throw out your plastic wrap "like the Japanese do," it's describing a Japan that doesn't exist. Keep what you use. This book is about where things go, not about which things you're allowed to own.

Myth 4. Seiri and seiton are an ancient household tradition

The claim. *Seiri, seiton, seiso* — sort, set in order, shine — are age-old principles passed down in Japanese homes.

What's actually true. The words are real, and they're ordinary everyday Japanese. The *system* — 5S, five steps each starting with "s" — is a workplace method. It comes out of Japanese

manufacturing, where it's credited as one of the practices that made just-in-time production work, and it spread internationally through management books in the 1990s.

So when a video presents 5S as grandmother's wisdom, it's presenting a factory checklist in a kimono.

What this means for your home. That doesn't make 5S useless — factories are very good at not losing things. But for a home you can't change, one of the five does almost all the work: **seiton**, a fixed place for every item, chosen so you can grab it without moving anything else. Most of this book is seiton applied to shelves that won't move.

What we checked and left out

"Japanese homes don't use paper towels." Plenty of viewers who live in Japan say this is wrong — that "kitchen paper" is in constant use. We believe them. But we couldn't find a survey or publication that measures it properly, so it isn't in this chapter.

That's the rule for the whole book. If we can't show you where a claim comes from, it doesn't go in.

So what *is* different?

Not the materials. Japanese homes use the same plastic, the same coated pans and the same cling film as everyone else.

Not the people. Most of them find tidying a chore and struggle to throw things out, same as anyone.

What's different is the sequence. Measure the space first. Give every object one fixed place. Buy the container last, and buy it to fit.

That sequence works just as well on a rented shelf you're not allowed to move. The rest of *The Unchangeable Home* shows you how — room by room, starting with how to measure.

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That was Chapter 1

The Unchangeable Home is the whole method — room by room, for a home you can't drill, rebuild or renovate.

- **Chapter 2, Measure First:** the five measurements, and why the box gets bought last.
- **Nine rooms and situations:** the entryway, kitchen shelves, counters and appliances, food, clothes, the bathroom, the living room, moving, and storage for knees and backs.
- **54 methods.** ● 37 work in any home. ▲ 17 work with a condition — and the condition is written next to them.
- ⊘ **16 popular tips that need a drill,** listed so you can skip them, with what to do instead.
- **A printable measuring sheet** and inch–centimetre tables.
- **A source for every claim.**

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