
Lateral File Cabinets

Q1. What is the difference between a lateral and a vertical file cabinet?

A: A lateral file cabinet has wide, shallow drawers that pull out from front to back with files hanging side-to-side — you can see all the files in the drawer at once from the front. A vertical file cabinet has narrow, deep drawers with files hanging front-to-back — you're looking at the file tabs in a row from above. Lateral cabinets are wider and lower, making them suitable for use as work surfaces and for high-frequency file access. Vertical cabinets are narrower and taller, taking up less wall space but requiring more reaching for rear-drawer files.

Q2. What drawer count should I choose — 2, 3, 4, or 5 drawers?

A: The right drawer count depends on how much filing capacity you need and what you want to use the top surface for. Two-drawer laterals (approximately 28" to 30" tall) work as credenza-height storage with a functional top surface. Four-drawer units (52" to 54" tall) maximize filing capacity while keeping the top drawer accessible for most adults. Five-drawer units (65" to 68" tall) require reaching above shoulder height for the top drawer, which is impractical for short users. For most offices, the 4-drawer configuration offers the best balance of capacity and usability.

Q3. Can a lateral file cabinet hold legal-size documents?

A: Yes — most commercial lateral file cabinets accommodate both letter-size (8.5"×11") and legal-size (8.5"×14") hanging files. The wider drawer width of a lateral cabinet handles both sizes without requiring a special adapter in most cases. Confirm the product's stated file size compatibility before purchasing, as a small number of narrow lateral models (such as 24" wide units) may not accommodate legal size files without an add-on frame.

Q4. Do lateral file cabinets lock?

A: Yes — most commercial lateral file cabinets include a locking mechanism. The most common format is a core lock that, when engaged, blocks all drawers from opening (a full-width lock bar). Some models have individual drawer locks. For offices storing sensitive or regulated documents, look specifically for cabinets with a full-width lock bar rather than just a single-drawer lock, as the full-width bar secures all drawers simultaneously with one key.

Q5. How heavy is a lateral file cabinet when loaded?

A: An empty 4-drawer 36" lateral file cabinet typically weighs 130 to 180 lbs. When fully loaded with documents, the total weight can reach 300 to 450 lbs. This has significant implications for placement (avoid upper-floor locations without confirming the floor load rating) and for safety (never try to move a loaded lateral cabinet — always remove drawers or empty files before moving). The weight also means lateral cabinets should ideally be placed on their permanent location before loading.

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