

Less is more

How to simplify, pare down and focus on what's really important.

It's called the big box syndrome. We buy more stuff at big-box retailers. We drive bigger cars to get all of that stuff home. We have bigger homes to put everything in. And somehow we *still* don't seem to have enough room for everything.

Here are some specifics: In the 1950's, the average woman in the U.S. had four pairs of shoes. Today, it's thirteen pairs (and many more for a lot of women).¹ In 1970, the average size of a home was 1,400 square feet. Today, it's 2,340 square feet.² So, if more space and more clutter go hand in hand, even with that additional space, how can you get clutter under control?

1. Pretend that you are moving.

It's time to pare down. If you had to move, would you take it with you? Do you really need three hair dryers? Or what about all of those books; do you really need to keep all of them? Donate what you don't need.

2. Keep only what you love.

Ask yourself, do you really have to keep it? If not, go ahead and get rid of it. Put more focus on using the things that bring you happiness.

3. The benefits of less.

Less stuff equals more time. With less stuff, there's less to clean, organize and dust. With less stuff, your house looks uncluttered and cleaner. Let this motivate you.

4. Learn to love containers.

Containers instantly add order to chaos, and are the secret weapon of organizers everywhere. Put all the kids' shoes in a tub, the newspapers in a bucket, fingernail polish in a basket, and so on.

5. Everything in its place.

Yes, this is something your mother always said, but she was right. When everything has a place on a shelf, in a cabinet or in a bin, you'll avoid counter clutter and junk-filled drawers.

6. Remember the two-year rule.

If you haven't used something for two years, chances are you won't use it again. This particularly applies to clothes.

7. Don't get buried under sentimentality.

Sure, it's nice to keep possessions you cherish, but do you really need your high school prom dress? If you are keeping your wedding dress, have it professionally boxed at a dry cleaners and put it in storage. And your children's collection of stuffed animals? Keep one to pass on to the next generation, then donate the rest.

8. One in and one out.

If something new comes in the house, something old has to go out. This rule is pivotal to maintaining the simple, clutter-free existence you've worked so hard to achieve.

9. Maximize your storage.

There are all sorts of helpful items these days that help you make the most of small spaces. Ottomans with removable tops are the perfect place to store toys, board games or extra bedding. And under-bed baskets are great for storing large or awkward items.

10. Organize by bits.

It's going to take awhile to go through your entire house—after all, it may have taken you up to twenty years to acquire all of your current clutter—so be easy on yourself and try not to attempt too much in one sitting. Start with one closet and give yourself a six-hour limit.

¹ Source: SRBI Public Affairs, March 2006: www.srbi.com/time_poll_arc22.html

² Source: National Association of Home Builders: www.nahb.org/news_details.aspx?newsID=1483



What to do with your stuff

Donate to charity

- > charityguide.org
- > justgive.org
- > goodwill.org

Sell it online

- > ebay.com
- > i-soldit.com
- > craigslist.org



Tidy Tips

Simple Steps to Help you Achieve Organized Bliss.

Controlling the paper chase.

If stacks of paper are overwhelming your kitchen counters, desktop and tabletops, here are a few quick ways to get them under control:

- **Have your recycle bin ready.** When you bring in the mail, toss out the junk mail right away.
- **Read and route.** When paperwork enters the house, read it and route it to the other appropriate family members.
- **Create in-baskets for everyone.** Every family member gets one for signed permission slips, phone messages, bills, etc.
- **Keep a communal calendar.** Post everyone's schedule on one calendar, and keep all schedules and invites in a binder for backup.
 - **Take bill paying online.** You can receive and pay your bills on the Internet for a happy, paperless existence.

Secret weapons.

Essential tools that help you contain clutter.

- **Over-the-door vinyl shoe organizers.** These aren't just for shoes anymore. Install one on the closet door in your child's room for an easy place to put small toys.
- **Small stacking bins with drawers.** Use a few of these in a cabinet—one for first aid, one for kiddie medicine. You can pull out the entire drawer for easy access.
- **Sliding shelf baskets.** You can buy these in a variety of home improvement stores. Install one in the pantry and you'll be able to pull out everything on the shelf. No more finding four-year old cans of soup way in the back behind stacks of pasta boxes!
- **Sub shelves.** These help you create a shelf within a shelf and are especially handy for tall cabinets with few shelves. For example, install the extra shelf, put plates on the bottom shelf and then place mugs or glasses on top of the sub-shelf unit.

Make yourself at home.

Just moving in? Making yourself at home in your new surroundings is about more than unpacking. Below are a couple of organizational tips you can follow to make your new house *your* home.

- **Closet organizers.** Before you put anything in your closets, if you have it in your budget, upgrade your closet systems.
- **Get a great garage.** Once most people settle into their homes, it's commonplace for their garages to become the catch-all storage area for anything and everything. Take the opportunity to establish a storage system in your garage right away, and in six months, you still might be able to park your car in there!
- **Safety first.** Locate the closest police and fire stations as well as hospitals. Post emergency phone numbers near the phone. Make sure smoke alarms are installed and working. Is there a fire extinguisher? If not, purchase one and store it in an easily-accessed area.

Straighten up the house.

Once you've organized the house, keeping it that way is easier.

- **Do one room at a time.** Attack one room at a time, even if it's one room a day (or one room a week).
- **No zigzagging.** Have a plan to start at one end of the room and methodically work your way across.
- **Go for instant gratification.** Do the things that make the biggest difference first. Make the bed. Recycle the stack of newspapers. Put away the laundry.
- **Get it out.** If something belongs in another room, put it there.
- **Baby steps.** Avoid going from one floor of your home to another without returning an item to where it belongs. Keep a basket next to the stairs to collect items that need to be put away, and grab one each time you go by.