

## Five Tips for Starting a Decluttering Project

With its cold temperatures and gray skies, winter can infuse the blahs into even the most cheerful person. As refreshing as it sounds, we won't be opening up the windows and inviting fresh air and spring temperatures in anytime soon. So for those who want to experience some of that spring-cleaning lightness early, here's a suggestion that you'll find to be surprisingly rejuvenating, even in the dead of winter: let go of some of your things.

Decluttering has become an industry of its own. You can find plenty of books and services designed to help you get rid of material objects you no longer want or need. Whether you look for professional advice or simply tackle the project on your own, you will discover that lightening the burden of caring for, cleaning, insuring, packing and moving, keeping track of, storing, and stumbling over things can have a remarkable effect on your peace of mind.

So, gather the family and make a game of it. Set a goal and make a pact to meet it before the spring equinox on Friday, March 20. Here are five tips for getting started on your decluttering adventure.

1. As with any large project, it's important to have the tools you need at hand before you get started. In this case, you will need to set up some receptacles for processing certain belongings. We recommend the following:

- At least one heavy-duty garbage bag for things that are simply not worth keeping or passing on to anyone else
- At least one large, cardboard box for items that you are ready to give up, but which are in good shape and could be donated
- A designated place to set items that are in need of repairs

If you enjoy holding garage sales or selling things online, you may want to separate items that you think you can sell from those you'd rather donate.

2. You can start anywhere in the house, but a lot of people like to start with clothes or linen closets, partially because clearing out these spaces creates newfound storage spots for items that you decide to keep later in the process.

3. Regardless of where you start, as you go through the items in your closets, cabinets, drawers, and shelves, rather than asking yourself, "Would I use this?" or "Do I think I'll wear this?" ask yourself, "Would I miss it if it were gone?"

4. When it comes to clothing, it doesn't matter what you paid for an item or how much you loved it when you bought it. If it doesn't look good on you, it's uncomfortable, it requires too much work to maintain, or you just don't like it as much as you thought you did, donate or sell it.

Once you've weeded out the items you know you wouldn't miss if they weren't there, hang the rest of your clothes with the hangers backwards (so the hooks are facing you rather than the back of the closet). As you wear items, hang them back up with the hanger turned around. After six or twelve months, you'll be able to see which items you haven't worn and decide at that point whether it's worth keeping them or not.

5. Anything you place in your designated "get it repaired" spot should be repaired right away. If it's not important enough to you to repair it and use it by March 20, you probably don't need it. Add it to the donation box and let it go.

Set a deadline for your potential sale items and set your donation pick-up on that day. If you haven't felt motivated to list your things online or hold your garage sale by your deadline, add those items to the donation box and let your chosen charity take them away. Someone will get good use out of them, making them far more valuable than they were when they were sitting unused in your home.

While nothing beats the fresh feeling of a scrubbed and sparkling home when spring finally arrives, ridding yourself of those belongings that are just taking up space in your house can improve your mood and simplify your life. It's a great way to keep that winter melancholy at bay until the sunshine returns.

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