



Out With The Old!

Enjoy the lightness of a clutter-free existence.

When it comes to clutter, we all seem to accumulate it; finding ourselves one day staring at an overflowing junk drawer, hall closet or two-car garage and wondering, "Where did it all come from?" Controlling your clutter gives you peace of mind and adds comfort and efficiency to your home.

Where does it all go?

There are lots of options for getting rid of your stuff, and the most obvious—putting it out on the curb for garbage trucks—usually isn't the best. After all, your local landfill doesn't need your old clothes and CDs, but somebody else might. Here are some resources for turning your trash into somebody else's treasure.

Using your postal code, you can find local branches of these national charities on their websites.

- Goodwill Industries International www.goodwill.on.ca
- The Salvation Army www.salvationarmy.ca
- Big Brothers Big Sisters www.bbbsc.ca

These web portals point you to charities by region or the type of cause you want to support.

- www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/menu-e.html
- www.CharityVillage.com
- www.CanadaOnline.about.com/cs/christmastop/a/charities.htm

These groups often take donations; every city has them.

- Law enforcement
See "police" or "fire department" in the local government pages of your phone book.
- Shelters
See "shelters" in the yellow pages.

And don't forget...

- Consignment stores
- Garage sales
- Recycling centres

If you never again want to find yourself sacrificing a weekend to sort through your mess, follow the "Four B's":



Buy more carefully.

Necessities notwithstanding, ask yourself if you really need what you're about to purchase or if you're just shopping for sport. Notice when you shop what you are tempted to buy. If you're attempting to cut clutter, try to restrict shopping to the necessities you regularly use, or items that you genuinely need and don't presently own.

Borrow or rent more often.

There are many things—books, equipment, formal wear—that you can enjoy once or twice without having to own them. Consider joining a "freecycle" group (check out www.freecycle.ca for a group near you), where you can trade or donate items that you no longer need in exchange for items or services that you do.

Balance your inventory.

If you do buy something, ask yourself, "What am I willing to get rid of in order to make space for this item?" You do not have to

throw the old item away; consider donating that used armchair to a worthy cause, or giving your child's baby clothes to a friend who's expecting.

Be disciplined.

Start with 10 minutes of clutter cleanup each day: Do your dishes after each meal, hang up your clothes as soon as you take them off and go through your mail every day. The best way to ensure success is to design a cleanup initiative that fits your lifestyle. If you're the sort who leaves a trail from the garage door to the bedroom when you come home each evening, go with that flow by purchasing a coat rack to hang right by the door and a key rack for the wall next to it. By working with your natural tendencies instead of against them, you'll avoid unnecessary frustration and be more likely to follow through on your clutter-cutting goals.



A Place For EVERYTHING!

Reducing clutter is a two-step process. The first step is to go through problem areas, weed out unnecessary items and give them away, sell them or throw them out.

That might sound like enough of a job by itself, but the really important step is the second one: organizing what remains. Controlling clutter means not just finding a place for everything, but making sure it's a place where you'll put things—every time.



1 Do I Need This?

WARMING UP

- If you can, set aside a weekend or two to tackle your clutter.
- Get plenty of large trash bags, boxes and labelling materials (e.g., felt-tip markers and tape).
- Wear comfortable clothes you don't mind getting dirty, and protect your hands if necessary.
- Schedule appointments for disposal of items (call charities for pick-up Monday morning, plan a garage sale for the following weekend) as an incentive.

DIVING IN

- Walk around your house and make a list of problem areas (e.g., kitchen junk drawer, office bookshelf and hall closet).
- Set realistic goals for the day, including completing one area that bothers you.
- Set up and label several empty boxes for items to donate or sell (e.g., charity and garage sale).
- Have one box for items that need to be put elsewhere in the house, and one for items that need to be returned to friends and neighbours.

LETTING GO

Deciding whether or not to keep things can be hard. If you have doubts, ask yourself these questions.

- Do I need it for record keeping?
- Do I cherish it deeply?
- Have I used it this year?
- Will I use it (honestly) in the coming year?
- If I fixed it, would I use it again?
- Is it worth the space it takes up?
- Is it too expensive to replace?

NOTE:

Don't bite off more than you can chew! Mix problem areas that may take hours with small, manageable spots, such as a drawer or bookshelf.

2 I Need This, Now What?

You will stay organized if you put things in places that make sense. Use these guidelines:

- Is it within reach of where it's used?
- Is it together with similar items?
- Are all parts of it grouped together?
- If it's used frequently, is it in front? Infrequently, in back?

Having the right place for things also means using your space wisely. Containers, hooks and shelves, like the ones listed below, are the answer to this dilemma.

BATHROOM: Magnetic strip on the back of medicine cabinet door for scissors, tweezers, etc.

BEDROOM: Under-bed storage boxes for off-season clothes; shelved caddies for shoes.

CLOSETS: Group cleaning products in buckets by room; group linens by set in pillow cases.

DESK: Filing cabinets with alphabetized folders for archived documents; separate boxes or baskets for documents to be handled (e.g., mail and bills to be paid).

ENTRYWAY: Shelves for boots and slippers; hooks for keys and umbrellas.

GARAGE: Hooks for suspending bikes overhead; large bins for sports equipment; peg board for tools; shoe boxes and baby food jars for hardware.

KITCHEN: Clear plastic, stackable bins for dry goods; hanging baskets for fruits and vegetables; wall grid for hanging utensils.

LAUNDRY ROOM: Tiered hampers for pre-sorting by color/temperature.

LIVING SPACES: Magazine racks for current issues; specially designed cubbies or entertainment centres for electronics, games, DVDs, CDs, etc.