



10 WAYS TO CONQUER CLUTTER

Clutter. It creeps into crawl spaces, fills up cupboards and, when we least expect it, overflows into the garage. Whether you're trying to stage your home for an open house, want to reduce the number of items you'll have to pack, or you just want to live in a cleaner, more organized space, here are some steps to help you pare down those piles.

WORK IN THREES

Working with bags or boxes, place items into one of three piles: keep, donate or trash. You can always sift through the piles later to decide what to recycle or sell at your next yard sale.

START SMALL

The best way to exercise your clutter-busting muscles is to start with a manageable area like a desk drawer or small closet. Give yourself a time limit (15 minutes) and get it done, then pick another area and try to do it even faster.

REJECT THE NEED TO COLLECT

Just say no to stuff you really don't need. As hard as it might be, pare down your collection of figurines, matchbooks or Ming vases to five favorite items only. Or, if you can't bear to part with any of them, make a plan to only have five items on display at one time and keep the rest packed in boxes. Simpler looks and feels better – and having too much of anything out in the open will only require more dusting.

KEEP YOUR PAPER SORTED

Organize paper as it enters your home by sorting mail near the front door with a three-way filing system: bills, reading materials and recycling. Place it near a calendar so you can mark down important events right away. If the urge to hang onto items is too strong, get yourself a nice basket to hold all of these oh-so-necessary documents and go through them once a month to see what really needs reading or keeping.

AIM TO LOSE A THIRD

While most professional organizers will insist you cut your belongings in half, try for a third. If you have 30 scarves, trim them down to 20. Four shelves of books? Go for less than three. Do you really need five fondue sets? If getting rid of your items is painful, remember: less is more...more space, more time, more peace. And if you're moving, more savings on moving costs.

ONE IN, ONE OUT

Try this rule to keep clutter at bay: if something new comes in, something old has to go. Clothes, books, shoes, cars, shampoo bottles, tools...nothing is exempt. Note that "new" means new to you, not necessarily brand new. So those hand-me-downs count too.

PUT IT IN ITS PLACE

Once you decide to keep an item, honor it by giving it a designated spot. That way you'll always know where to find it and where to put it back when you're done using it.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

If you can't think of the last time you used a small appliance (like that bread maker that's stowed under the sink) or wore a particular outfit (shoulder pads, anyone?), it might be time to give it to someone who can really appreciate it. Still not ready to give it up? Place the item in question in a box or a cupboard for six months. If it hasn't been used by then, give it away.

KEEP AT IT

Conquering clutter isn't something that you can accomplish in a single afternoon; you have to work at it every day. The more often you do it, the less you have to do. Plus, living in a clutter-free home just feels better since you're not digging through drawers and cupboards looking for lost keys or important warranty documents, and you're not dealing with piles of stuff everywhere you turn.

AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE'S NO ONE CURE-ALL FOR CLUTTER, BUT BY APPLYING JUST A FEW OF THESE METHODS YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TURN YOURSELF INTO A CLUTTER CONQUEROR!