

Spring Cleaning

Dealing with Your Stuff

"That's the whole meaning of life, isn't it?—trying to find a place for your stuff... A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff."

—George Carlin, comedian

IT'S THAT TIME OF year again. The ground has thawed, the crocuses are in bloom and your home is bursting at the seams from the build-up of dust, must and clutter. Spring cleaning is a tradition that not only clears the stagnant energy inside your space but also the cobwebs inside your mind as you mentally prepare for a new season of possibilities.

Where to begin?

Start with clutter. Downsize and organize. Before wiping the blinds, washing the curtains and removing dust bunnies, you need to deal with your personal explosion of stuff. Translation: clear closets, organize drawers and storage areas, remove obstructions to pathways throughout your home and dispense with unnecessary items.

But how do you identify clutter?

According to Alison Roberts, a professional organizer based in Comox, B.C. and author of *Clutter's Dirty Secret* (Trafford Publishing, 2006) clutter can be defined as "anything you don't use

or love, too much stuff in too small a space, anything that is disorganized."

Roberts has an M.A. in Psychology and a keen interest in the principles of *feng shui*—the Chinese art of space organization for maximum flow of positive energy. "We surround ourselves with so much stuff," says Roberts, "that it creates a physical barrier which prevents what we really want from coming into our lives."

When hired to help a client clear clutter, Roberts arrives with her clipboard in hand for a 'walkabout': "I go through their home, creating an ongoing dialogue about things that they've purchased and stuffed in closets and compiling a list of 'clutter hotspots.' Later, she gives a report on strategies to de-clutter, maximize storage and create groupings. If desired, she will return to the home to help with sorting. For some, it's very therapeutic. "Verbalizing helps. Some people feel they finally have permission to let something go."

If giving your whole house an overhaul seems daunting, don't fret. Whether you're employing the services of a professional organizer or clearing clutter on your own, start with one hotspot. "Start with a junk drawer or closet, something small," says Roberts. "Starting with the garage or attic is too overwhelming."

Clutter is not just a result of disorganization, but often a case of holding onto gifts we never cared for, remnants of a 'former self' and 'just-in-case' items that we might use or may come back in style.

"Recognize that you have changed since you bought or received some of those things," Roberts suggests. "Give yourself a deadline and if you don't use an item by that time, let it go." When it comes to clothing, the 80/20 rule applies: we wear 20 percent of what we own 80 percent of the time. Roberts' strategy for ongoing maintenance: one item in, one item out.

Her best advice? Get several large, sturdy boxes and sort directly into them. Label the boxes: Garbage. Recycle. Sell or Consignment. Donate. Return to Rightful Owner. As soon as a box is full, get it out of your home. "The danger is that people fill up a box, but begin to have second thoughts."

Once you have liberated your home of clutter, you are ready to dust, mop and polish, and to welcome sunshine back into the corners.

—Belinda Bruce 



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