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How To Downsize Your Home: 10+ Tips To Help You Declutter And Simplify

VICTORIA ARAJ | 12-MINUTE READ
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Bigger isn't always better. In many cases, less is more – think of the tiny home trend and the overall popularity of downsizing. People downsize for many reasons. The most common ones we hear from our clients who downsize are to save money and to get rid of unused space. Downsizing your home can be the right move at any stage of life depending on your goals. You may find that purchasing a smaller home makes the most sense once you become an empty-nester, or maybe you're a millennial who'd like more money to retire early or travel.

Since there are so many reasons to downsize, we created a guide to help you learn how to downsize your home efficiently and live clutter-free. We gathered over 10 tips on downsizing your home, plus tips specifically for seniors looking to downsize and to maintain your clutter-free lifestyle after your move.

1. Start As Soon As Possible And Pace Yourself

You should start the downsizing process as soon as possible to give yourself time to properly sort through your house without feeling overwhelmed. **A general rule of thumb is that you'll want to start at least 3 months before you plan to move but honestly, the sooner the better.**

Aside from getting a jump on the downsizing process, you can also keep your home free of clutter and things you no longer need. There are some different organization methods that have gained popularity in recent years, like the KonMari method. Whatever method you choose, the goal is to find a balanced workflow and to end up with possessions that you actually need to keep around. Some popular methods include:

- **One-A-Day Method**: Let go of one item per day or let go of the number of items that corresponds with the date (i.e. giving away 12 items on the 12th of a given month).
- **KonMari Method**: Take on clutter by category (clothes, paper/books, miscellaneous items and then sentimental items). If an item no longer "sparks joy" then it's time to get rid of it.
- **Four-Box Method**: Restrict your options for what to do with a particular item by only giving yourself four options. Typically, these options are keep, donate, trash/recycle and sell. You should try to avoid putting items in storage.
- **Closet-Hanger Method**: Face all closet hanger hooks away from you. Once you wear an item, turn the hanger hook toward you. After 6 months, donate any clothes that are still facing away.

2. Focus On One Room At A Time

The thought of decluttering or organizing your whole home might be daunting, so remember to take it one step at a time. You're more likely to complete the whole process if you break it into multiple, more manageable projects. Try creating a plan or schedule broken down by room or smaller projects within a room to make sure that you stay on track but don't get overwhelmed. Some example tasks to take on one at a time could include:

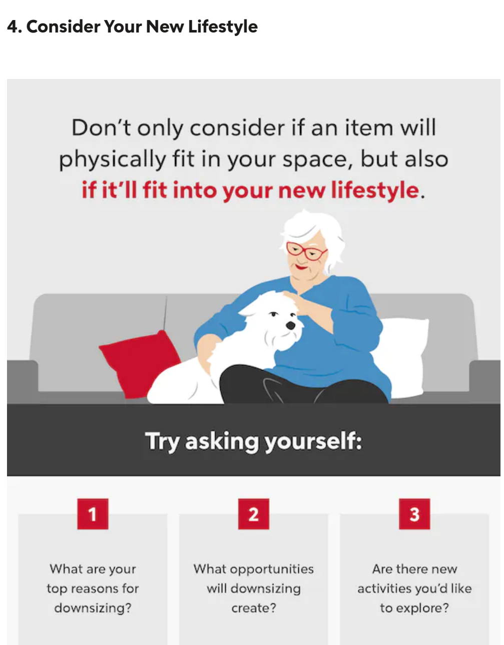
- Go through DVDs and video games
- Address the dreaded "junk drawer"
- Pick shoes to give away and to keep
- Trim down clothing in your closet
- Tackle your dresser drawers
- Organize small kitchen items
- Match up containers, pots and pans with their lids

3. Measure Out Your New Space

In order to properly downsize, you have to know the size of the space you're aiming to fit into. Ideally, you'll know the square footage and shape of each room. This will help you figure out which large furniture pieces you should get rid of before the move. If you don't have the exact measurements of your new place or don't have a new place selected yet, focus on decluttering and getting rid of items you know you won't need. Once you get more specifics, you can dig into those items that you were on the fence about.

Know that your current furniture might not fit in your space. Rather than squeezing large furniture into a smaller space, see what actually fits and take the opportunity to simplify and redesign your space.

4. Consider Your New Lifestyle



Aside from inch-by-inch measurements, you should also consider the bigger picture of what you're hoping to gain from downsizing. You should be considering not just what will fit physically but what items fit in what you want out of your new space. Downsizing is a chance to reset and revamp – so take advantage of that!

Understanding your core reasoning and goals can help you stick to your plan and make you more excited about the process. Take it a step past the common answers of saving money and space and ask yourself the deeper "why." Maybe you're hoping to save money by downsizing, but "why?" Is it to be able to travel more or help send your grandchildren to college? Or maybe you want less home to maintain so you can spend more time with your partner or pick up a new hobby. The more specific your goals, the more effective they are in motivating you. Some questions to ask yourself include:

- What are your top reasons for wanting to downsize?
- What opportunities will downsizing create?
- What will you miss the most about your old home?
- Are there new hobbies or activities you'd like to explore?
- What are you most excited about in this downsizing process?
- What are you most nervous about in this process? Are there any steps you can take to help?
- What is the first thing you want to do when you're settled into your new home?

By setting your intentions and goals ahead of time, you'll have a much clearer view of what items will fit into your new lifestyle and home.

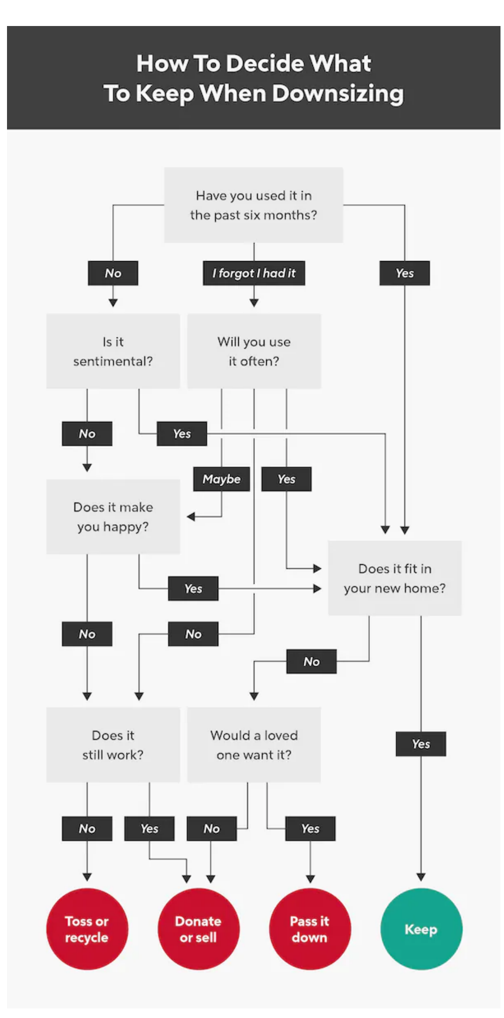
5. Set Clear Decluttering Ground Rules

Once you start decluttering and combing through items, it could become easy to make exceptions here and there. Before you know it, all you've done is taken items from one place and moved them to another, instead of determining where they actually belong.

The best way to avoid this is by sticking to a strong set of ground rules and options for sorting your items. A common set of options could be:

- Keep
- Donate or sell
- Trash or recycle
- Pass it down or memorialize (through a photo)

Of course, categories can vary based on your specific needs and goals, but you should try to avoid categories that fall in between, as "maybes" can quickly stack up. To help you sort through these items, see our flowchart below:



Whether you're decluttering for the sake of organization or to move to a smaller space, try to remember to document the process and take before and after photos – this can help you reminisce and also encourage you to keep up your good habits once decluttering and downsizing is complete!

6. Divvy And Offer Up Sentimental Items

There are bound to be some sentimental items that won't fit into your new space. For sentimental furniture and decor pieces, try reaching out to your family and friends to give the items a good home, especially if it's an item you'd like to keep in your family. Do this early and schedule pick-up times at least a week or two in advance of your move, depending on how often you use the item in your current space.

If there are items that your family members don't want or are too young to take right now, try selling them and putting the money you made in savings. When the time is right, you can pass on that gift and they can purchase something for their home that they really need.

If you know you're going to miss the item, but it has no place in your new home, take a photo of it and add any relevant details (where it came from, what it signifies). Create your own "treasure" photobook or work the photos into an album. Some additional ways to memorialize items and memories include:

- Take photos of sweet notes and cards
- Scan and upload paper mementos like tickets or playbills
- Photograph or scan can your child's artwork

There are so many different ways to organize your memories. You could create chronological, categorical or any number of different photo books, whatever makes the most sense to you.

7. Sell Or Donate Nonsentimental Items

For those nonsentimental items you don't plan on bringing into your new space, try selling them to pay for moving costs or new decor items. There are plenty of online marketplaces that make selling online easy, like eBay, Craigslist, OfferUp, LetGo and more. Make sure you exercise the proper safety and anti-fraud precautions when using these apps to sell or buy items (guidelines can be found through each individual organization's site or app).

If there's no interest in certain items as you get closer to your moving day, consider donating them to a good cause. Some nonprofits and charities that accept and will pick-up home items and clothing include:

- Goodwill
- Salvation Army
- Habitat for Humanity
- The Arc
- Furniture Bank

If there are items of high value that you don't want to bring with you to your new space, consider getting them appraised so they can garner their full value at an auction, be donated (with proper tax deductions) or passed down as an early family legacy gift.

8. Organize And Digitize As You Go

Take the time to leave your space more organized than you found it. Not only will it improve your current day-to-day, but it will also make packing much easier. Organize smaller items in your drawers by using trays and boxes – these will transfer easily from your current home to moving boxes to their new place in your home.

Papers and files can really build up over the years so get your shredder out and get ready to thin out your filing cabinet. Get rid of statements or documents that you have online access to and any tax-related paperwork past seven years old. Other documents can be scanned and organized in neat digital files. Make sure you back up those files on a separate drive and if it's something you couldn't bear to lose (birth certificate, etc.) make sure you have a safe space to keep your physical copies in your new home.

9. Repurpose Or Memorialize Items

There may be certain things in your home that you really want to keep but you realize they won't fit in your new space. The first option would be to photograph it and add it to your 'treasure' photobook. If that still doesn't work for you, try and think if there's a way it could be repurposed or upcycled and incorporated into your new space. For example:

- Turn your t-shirt collection into a quilt that you can actually use
- Convert your most-prized pieces into wall art you can enjoy every day
- Convert that old toy chest into usable seating and storage

10. Bring In Help If Needed

Buying and selling at the same time can be a lot to handle. If you feel any steps of the downsizing and moving processes are above your ability or you don't have the time, bring in some help. You could first put out feelers to your particularly organized friends and family but try to not make it feel like an obligation. If they do agree to help out, make sure you thank them properly.

Know what your strengths and weaknesses are – if you're a strong organizer, maybe you'll just need help moving boxes on moving day. If you have a hard time getting and staying organized or letting go of items, a professional organizer could be well-worth your money.

- **Organization Tip**: Hire help for your most difficult room and then see if you can apply what you learned to your other rooms by yourself.
- **Packing Tip**: Don't pack jewelry, money or other valuables, keep those close by during your move or temporarily place them in a vault or bank lockbox.

To save these downsizing tips in a shareable visual, click the download button below:

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Senior Downsizing Tips

A 2018 study showed that 77% of people over the age of 50 want to remain in their current neighborhood for as long as possible and age in place. To make that happen, that might mean getting a smaller, more manageable and more accessible property. We've rounded up some senior-specific downsizing tips to help make that jump:

Make It A Family Affair

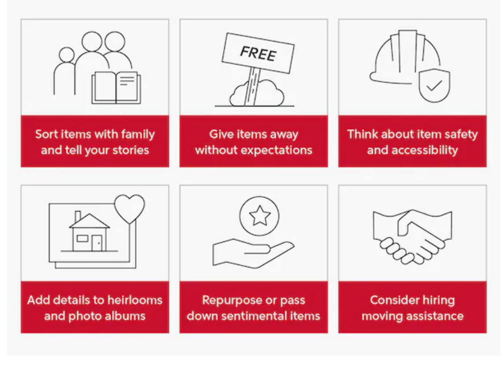
Invite your kids or grandkids to help you sort through items. Tell your stories and encourage them to ask questions. If it can't happen in-person, do this over a video chat so no one feels left out.

Give Without Expectations

Don't pressure your family members to take something and don't check in on the item after the fact if they do. Understand that any item you gift may end up donated or given away. Also remember that while your family loves you dearly, they may not have space for your things.

Think About Accessibility And Safety

Some items won't lend themselves to your new home or lifestyle. Consider accessibility and safety as you sort. Maybe you'll decide you don't really need those stilts anymore. Start thinking about which safety precautions you can add to your home ahead of time rather than waiting until they're necessary to add them.



Add Details To Photo Albums

While you reminisce, take the time to add details, names and dates to photos and to labels on family heirlooms. It will be more fun for guests when they peruse your albums and easier to know who is who and what came from where when you eventually pass those items down.

Collaborate On A Family Recipe Book

We all have those family recipes that we look forward to during the holidays and one of the best gifts you can give is passing down traditions. As you're going through your kitchen, gather and organize your recipe cards so you can create a mini family cookbook. Once you've created it online you can have multiple books printed – give them out to your children, grandchildren or other family members (and one for yourself for your new home).

Consider Senior Moving Assistance And Resources

Moving can be a long process that requires a lot of physical effort. While your family would likely love to help, they may not be available throughout the entire process. To help save yourself the time, consider getting professional help. If you do, make sure you get a signed, written agreement ahead of time with costs and the services detailed.

- HUD Counseling Services is a great place to start if you're unsure of where to find help.
- National Institute on Aging also has some great resources for those looking to age in place.

Post-Move Tips After Downsizing Your Home

After you've put in all this work to downsize and simplify your life, you'll want to keep up the good work. It can be tempting to start filling in the nooks and crannies of your new place but you can avoid a clutter-relapse by following the tips below.

Do Routine Organizing And Decluttering

Clutter has a funny way of sneaking up on people. To keep your new space in tip-top shape, make cleaning and decluttering a habit throughout the year on a schedule that works best for you. For some, four seasonal purges work best while others may need to give their space monthly attention.

Be Discerning About New Purchases

Be very picky about new purchases to avoid collecting clutter. Some people live by the rule that if something new comes into their home, something else must go. This will help keep clutter to a minimum and keep you from spending unnecessarily. If you're really on the fence about a purchase or have poor spending habits, give yourself a 48-hour cool-off period to see if you truly need the item or if you just got caught up in the thrill of an impulse buy.

Ask For Donations In Lieu Of Gifts

Even the gifts with the best intentions can sit and collect dust if you don't really need them. For certain events, a gift registry can be a great solution to ensure you only get what you absolutely need. In other cases, you may decide to ask for donations to a charity of your choice instead of gifts. As a bonus, this also means no one gets their feelings hurt because of a returned gift.

If you're curious about how much you could save by downsizing, plug the other home price into our mortgage calculator. Our home buying experts can also provide tailored advice for your home buying journey. They can help equip you with the info you need to make the best decision. For example, maybe you're a great candidate for refinancing your home instead of completely downsizing.

Whatever your situation is, we can help you assemble the tools you need to make the next best step, whether that's saving for a house, applying for a loan or calculating your mortgage savings. We've got you covered.

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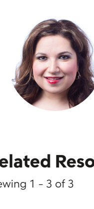
[2]If client locks their initial rate on a purchase loan between 7/19/22 and 2/28/23 and that loan closes, client is eligible for Rate Drop Advantage. Refinance offer must be claimed by locking initial rate between 120 days and 36 months from purchase closing date. Refinance loan must be on the same subject property as the original purchase loan. Rocket Mortgage will cover the following fees as a lender paid credit: first appraisal fees, credit report, tax certification, mortgage recording fee, flood certification and life of loan, notary fees in Pennsylvania and New York, and if a conventional loan, processing and underwriting fees. Rate Drop Advantage is only valid on conventional conforming and government loans in our retail channels. Offer may not be redeemed for cash or credit and is nontransferable. Offer cannot be retroactively applied to any loans. Offer may not be used with any other discounts, promotions or interest-only/buy-down and second lien products. This offer is subject to changes or cancellation at any time at the sole discretion of Rocket Mortgage. Additional restrictions/conditions may apply. This is not a commitment to lend and is contingent on qualification per full underwriting guidelines.



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