

How to Declutter Without Remorse

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A reader writes, “What is the best way to declutter your home without getting rid of stuff that you actually want or need?”

Great question! Let’s get one thing out of the way first. Most people think that decluttering is only done during spring cleaning. But the concept of spring cleaning does not make any sense at all. Spring is when you go outside and get your garden ready to plant and refresh the landscape. You take a big gulp of clean fresh air after being in the house all winter, and you want to stay outdoors.

The right time to do a major “spring” clean is right now. Winter absolutely is the best time to look around the house and clean top to bottom, and get rid of what you don’t need. Especially after Christmas and before the new year. Why not start out the new year with some decluttering?

The first thing to do is to figure out what you are happy with and what you are not happy with. One of the reasons that Marie Kondo’s book on “tidying up” is so popular is that she tells readers to get rid of things they are not “delighted” with. In other words, you should feel a connection with each of your material possessions. The problem with this method is that what delighted you five years ago may not delight you now.

Here’s where to begin.

- Set aside some quiet time to stand in each room of your home with a notebook. Let the scene soak in. Is everything you see contributing to the overall picture of beauty and function? What is extra, what is missing, what is out of sync? Write down what you see. When you have completed this exercise, you may find yourself calling the charity truck for a pickup. Don’t do more than one or two rooms at a time, or you’ll feel overwhelmed.
- Mental approach or attitude. It’s not what organizers you buy, it’s being disciplined about only keeping what you use and love.
- When you feel that your world is organized and where you want it, keep it that way. To do this, clean as you go and put things where they belong immediately after using them. Rather than putting lots of little things in organizers or keeping them out in view, put them away in drawers, cabinets, or trunks. Yes, you CAN teach children to do this.
- Make constant decisions about what delights you, and only keep those things. If this scares you, then put things in a closet for a few weeks to experience what it’s like without it. You can always pull it back out if you really love it.
- If you’re really nervous about making decluttering mistakes, spend the money to put it in storage. See how you feel.
- Never feel bad about spending money on new setups, layouts, etc. Over time we change what we think of our things.

Don't look back. You're going to make some mistakes. Remind yourself it's a material world, the real gifts and possessions you have are in your mind's eye.

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