

Questions/Tips

1. Living spaces are getting smaller - take all of the condos in downtown Toronto as an example. What's the number one rule for reducing clutter if you live in a space that's less than 600 square feet?

Purge, purge, purge. Really ask yourself two basic questions: do I use this, do I love this? If you haven't used it in the past twelve months, chances are you can live without it. The items in your home should give you a sense of joy, not a sense of dread or guilt. If it doesn't fit now, if you never liked it but it was a gift, if you may need it 'someday', or you can't remember what it is: toss it! Then really have high standards for what you do bring into your home in the future since space is precious. Two tried and true organizing sayings to live by: "use it or lose it" and "when in doubt throw it out"; make the tough decisions to purge unneeded items and you will have a great space, no matter how small, to live in.

2. Summertime = summer camp and short-trips to the cottage or beach. How can parents avoid packing the clutter when sending a kid off to camp or packing for a weekend getaway?

Really stick to the packing list that the camp gives you, or find one on-line. They seem very minimal but they have everything your little camper will need to survive at camp. Or make your own short packing list and have it handy when packing up the car for the cottage or the beach. You only have to make this list once but it will come in handy countless times and you can refine it as you go. Have an area for things to bring to the cottage, a corner of the house or a large bin, toss things in there as you think of them. Once your kids are old enough, make sure to include them in the packing, for example, when going to the beach each child can be responsible for packing one bathing suit, one towel and one toy in their own bag for the outing, that way you are responsible only for your own suit and towel, and the food and drinks of course.

3. Canadians are going green. What's your number one tip for an environmentally-friendly de-cluttering?

There are lots of people out there who would love to have your gently used items! With the items that you can live without, I would first, try to sell it through an on-line classifieds website like Kijiji.ca. Second, use the free section on the same site. Third, drive it to a local charity or shelter (call ahead and see what they need). And fourth, leave it on the curb for a neighbour to take home.

It really starts with what you are bring into your home in the first place. Your consumption: 'reduce'. Be harsh with yourself when you go shopping. What you bring into the house is the root of the problem. Can you take a break from buying any new clothing, decorative items, office supplies, craft and hobby materials, and toys for a while? Ask for no gifts, just cash, gift certificates or charity donations for your birthday/anniversary/wedding party. If you are pregnant, have

a 'hand-me-downs' baby shower and include a list of local baby consignment stores with the invitation. Only give 'consumables' when giving gifts: food, booze, soap etc., gift certificates to the movies, a restaurant, the LCBO.

Before you shop ask yourself: Do I really need this? Do I have something similar at home? Can I think about it for a couple days then decide whether or not it is essential?

4. June is wedding season and many couples find themselves with two of each. What's the number one tip for consolidating two households and curbing the clutter? Along the same lines, if it's true that opposites attract, someone is messy and someone is neat? What's an easy tip to stay clutter free?

The merging of two households can result in a lot of stuff. Again, try to purge what you can live without before you move or your partner moves in. Then ditch any doubles: keep whichever of the two is better or newer. To make room, try to sell/donate/recycle anything you haven't used in a year, including books, magazines, cds, electronic equipment, clothes and furniture. Make room to share your closet by only keeping clothes that fit you, look good and make you feel good. Finally, you may need to install extra storage like some shelves way up high in the closet, above doorways or along hallways will help.

When a neat freak marries a pack rat: take a deep breath and don't take it personally. You are both going to have to give in a little bit. If the clutter bug can remember to put their dirty clothes in the basket every night then maybe the neat freak can relax a bit and not start washing the dishes before everyone's finished eating dinner. If you can each have your own space to keep as messy or as tidy as you like, that would help, then you just have to compromise on the rest of the house. The only person you can control is yourself so don't try to make your partner into another version of you, it won't work. Be compassionate and patient, tell them how you feel not what you think they should be doing and hopefully you two can come to an agreement to meet closer to middle ground. If that doesn't work maybe suffering some consequences will work: don't do any laundry for the slob just let it pile up in their own basket, and for the neat freaks plan a fun outing on a day off and request their company, taking them away from spending all their spare time ironing the sheets!

5. Canadians are a nation of clutter collectors, in general. If there was one thing that all Canadians should do to minimize their clutter, what would it be?

Make regular appointments with yourself to de-clutter and get organized. The kind of appointment that you don't miss unless you are really sick, like a dentist appointment. And the more regular the better: every Saturday ten to noon; every Monday 2-3pm; every 15th of the month for three hours. During that time you purge a room or an area that's driving you crazy and post the items on-line. After a few weeks (or months) your place will be significantly de-cluttered and you will

have started a de-cluttering habit that in small chunks, doesn't leave you exhausted or overwhelmed.

Second, take a break from bringing anything new into the house...stop shopping. Even for one month make a pact with yourself or with your partner to only buy 'essentials' and absolutely nothing else. During that time, keep appointments with your self to purge unwanted items from your home. Eat up the backlog of canned goods and fancy condiments in your kitchen. Use up all the half empty bathroom products, re-gift something new you received but don't love, to someone else. You will benefit in many ways from a shopping hiatus exercise. You may break the habit of impulse shopping; of having more than you can store in your house; of buying more clothes and jewelry than you, or your children, can wear; of having more toys than can be played with in a week; of buying food that goes bad before you can eat it all.

You will also benefit in many other ways:

- Environmentally, you will go beyond just recycling to reducing the amount of disposable packaging that you buy.*
- You will spend time doing much more important things (cooking, exercise...).*
- You will simplify your life and gain a greater sense of control.*

Before I shop I will ask myself:

- Do I really need this?*
- Do I have something similar at home?*
- Can I think about it for a couple days then decide whether or not it is essential?*
- What if Jaclyn was standing beside me right now?*