

Cut the Clutter & Simplify Your Life!

Spring has arrived! As we witness the “renewal” of nature in the grass, trees and flowers, we also have that same sense of “renewal” inside the home as we move away from the sometimes sluggish winter months. The age-old tradition of spring cleaning has been happening for centuries. Sometimes referred to as “shaking the house”, this tradition can give us a sense of purpose to tackle the challenge of the clutter that enters into our daily lives.

To address the challenge of clutter, we must have a plan. To create our plan, we need to identify the clutter that is the biggest frustration for us. Maybe it is all of the paper clutter we have – mail, newspapers, magazines or bill receipts. It could be the closet that overflows its doors, resulting in piles of clothes placed around the bedroom. Or it may be the toolbox that no longer holds all of the tools. That frustration is your starting point.

Now that you have a starting point, the most important thing to remember is to start small. Choose the floor of the closet, the top of the desk or the drawer of a tool box. When we look at our project in smaller pieces, we allow us to be successful. That success, in turns, keeps us motivated to complete the entire project.

Using the box approach is an effective way to help you sort the clutter. Sort items into boxes labeled *Keep, Store, Give Away/Sell, Throw Away*. It is also helpful to have a laundry basket to place items in that need to be returned to their proper place – dishes that need to be returned to the kitchen, for example.

Choosing your point of attack, pick up items one by one and quickly decide which container they go in. Give yourself a time limit before you start. Using a timer will help you keep focused and working efficiently. When your time is up, pat yourself on the back, toss out the trash and make one tour around the house to return misplaced items to their proper homes.

When you reach a “clutter emergency” and can’t decide what to do with an item, consider the following questions: How long has it been since I used this? Do I like it? Does it work properly? Is it broken? Do I have more of this kind of thing? How many do I need? Finally, ask yourself - *If I keep this, what will I get rid of to make some room?*

Once you have finished clearing out the items you no longer want or need, the next step is to find a home for every item. Start by grouping similar items together. This allows you to make one decision about how to store the whole group. You can visualize how much space you need to store the items and the best way to keep them organized. Store items close to where they will be used, with items used frequently in the most convenient location. For example, the hammer, screwdrivers and wrench that you use most often should be stored in the top of your tool box, with other items stored in another compartment. The tool box should then be stored where it is

convenient, based on where the tools are used.

Large, undivided spaces are inefficient for storage and make it difficult to keep items organized. By dividing the space, such as adding shelving, you can group and organize items so you can more quickly and easily locate the item you want. For example, you can divide your closet into smaller spaces with a specific purpose such as shoes on a shelf, shirts in a particular section, etc.

Finally, when using totes to organize supplies, consider totes that are the same size and ones that are clear. In addition to labeling what is in each tote, having tubs that allows you to see what is inside helps you find items more quickly.

As you work to cut the clutter, keep in mind that a system is only as good as the maintenance that goes into it. When you use an item, return it immediately to its designated space. Do a “walk-through” each week to make sure the storage systems you have put in place are working as you intended and make adjustments as needed. Stop and give yourself a pat on the back for a job well-done!

Source: “Cut the Clutter and Get Organized”, Denise Dias, K-State Research & Extension. For more information about family resource management or adult development and aging, contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to kgoul@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu.