



DECLUTTERING YOUR HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

With the holiday season in full swing, many Oklahomans are making the trip to the attic or storage building to bring out the decorations. Boxes of ornaments, wreaths, the family heirloom nativity set and other items are a must for your holiday decorating.

But if your home already is cluttered, adding more to the mayhem can be stressful. The front hall closet is likely stuffed with winter wear that has seen better days. Other storage areas such as attics, garages and unused bedrooms may be filled with plastic storage tubs that are full of who knows what. With Christmas right around the corner, many people will be adding to the contents of their home with new gifts they receive.

While some people do put learning a new skill or starting an exercise program on their New Year's Resolution list, it can be a good idea to make a resolution early this year and clear out the clutter before putting up your holiday decorations, said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

"Decluttering your home can be a tough job to get started, but once it's done, you'll be glad you did it," Peek said. "When all the extra stuff gone, you'll be amazed at how easy it will be to maintain."

As with any project, it is a good idea to set goals. Be specific in what you want to accomplish. Is your main goal to clean out the spare bedroom that has been used as a collection point for a while? Or is it something as simple as cleaning out the junk drawer in the kitchen? Whatever it is, write it down. You may even find it helpful to put project-completion dates on the calendar to help hold yourself accountable.

Sometimes tasks can seem unsurmountable, so it is a good idea to identify small projects that will provide a lot of satisfaction. Pick one area, whether it is the corner of a room that has served as a catch-all, a shelf in a closet or even a stack of papers that have been on the dining room table for a while.

"Don't try to do too much all at once or you'll be overwhelmed. Instead, take baby steps and work in small increments of time – say 30 minutes," she said. "Completing a few smaller tasks will hopefully give you the boost you need to tackle larger jobs."

As you begin clearing out the clutter and come across things you no longer want to keep, place these items in boxes labeled trash, storage, donate and for sale. Use these for sorting as you declutter. When you finish cleaning an area, follow through quickly with getting the items to their final destination.

If your closet is stuffed with clothes you no longer wear, donate them to those who can use and enjoy them now. For example, find a women's shelter where the clothes can be donated. Check with local schools to see if they are having a coat drive. There are lots of places to donate gently used clothing.

"Some local charities will come pick up donations. Check around your area to see what groups will do home pickup," she said. "Set a firm pickup date and this will get you energized to get as much stuff gathered as possible. And an added bonus is you won't have boxes and bags just sitting around taking up space until you have time to get them delivered."

Peek said if you have a habit of piling things on any flat surface in your home, make an effort to clear off areas that have become catch-all spaces, such as counter tops, dining room tables and night stands. These areas are known as hot spots. Manage your home's hot spots before they accumulate clutter.

To help keep clutter under control, institute the one-in-one-out rule. For every new book you bring into your house, let one go. Donate it to your library or other charity. You couldn't resist the sale and bought new shoes? Get rid of a pair you already own. Do the same with clothes and other items you purchase.

"With the holiday season in full swing, hosting a gathering at your home can be a great motivator to clear out the clutter," she said. "No matter what the reason, you'll see how satisfying it is to keep your home clutter-free and organized all the time."



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