



25 ways to declutter for the new year

Make this your year to get organized (finally!). These expert tips will help you shed all that unwanted stuff—as quickly and painlessly as possible—and find the right spots for everything else.

BY BERIT THORKELSON
PHOTOS MARTY BALDWIN
STYLING HEATHER HARDT

YOUR BEST YEAR EVER

74.1%

of readers say cutting clutter at home would help 2011 be their best year ever.

1 Every three months or so, reserve one Saturday morning for a family cleanout. Set a timer for 30 minutes and have each person find things in his or her own space to donate or throw away. Box up the donations and drop them off right away, then reward yourselves with lunch out.

Meredith Schwartz, penelopeloveslists.com

2 Avoid zigzag organizing. Scattering your efforts over multiple rooms prevents you from seeing progress. For visible, dramatic results, work one room at a time, one section at a time, completing each area before you move on to the next.

Julie Morgenstern, author of *Organizing from the Inside Out*

3 When you're trying to decide whether to keep something, ask yourself three questions: Do I love it? Do I use it? Could someone else use it?

Claire Kurtz, thewellorganizedwoman.com



4 A system that's a natural extension of your habits is easier to stick with than one that forces dramatic change. So set up solutions right where clutter collects, such as a labeled pail for each family member's shoes and other equipment, *above*, in a bookshelf right by the front door.

5 Give frequently accessed papers (take-out menus, sports schedules, phone directories) a dedicated spot, rather than in a pile on the counter or stuck to the fridge. Three-hole-punch all that paper, and store it in a pretty binder with labeled tabs.

Aby Garvey, *simplify101.com*

6 Create a repair center for clothes that need mending, toys that need batteries, things that need gluing. That way, unusable items aren't in general circulation, and you know where to look when you have time to tackle a project.

Julie Morgenstern

7 Relegating a sentimental item you no longer have use for to a box in the closet, basement, or attic does nothing to honor it. Instead, take a photo of the item and put it in a scrapbook or load it on your digital picture frame. Then donate the item. It's both space-saving and respectful.

Scott Roewer, professional organizer

8 Each spring and fall, do CPR on your closet: Categorize, Purge, and Rearrange. Carefully consider each item. If it doesn't make you feel wonderful or look fabulous, it's a no. Put it in the "to donate" box, and put that box in your car right away.

Debbie Lillard, author of *Absolutely Organized*

9 A tighter focus for your to-do list clears mental clutter. Include only your three most important tasks, and don't let less important busywork distract you. If you complete everything on your list, great. If not, at least you'll know you spent time on the highest-priority tasks.

Meredith Schwartz

10 I spend a few minutes every night before bed restoring order to my purse. I remove all trash, return floating change to my wallet, and replenish tissues and business cards. It makes me feel ready to start the day.

Claire Kurtz

11 Tackle your junk drawer first. Remove anything you don't use at least monthly, then sort what's left into the compartments of a drawer organizer that completely fills the drawer. You won't have room to stash things that don't belong there.

Janna Lufkin, stylist

12 Every time you arrive home, clear the car of anything that doesn't permanently belong in it. Keep a tote or basket in the car for this purpose, and draft your passengers to help—nobody leaves the car empty-handed! Stay vigilant, and it'll become second nature.

13 Make clutter-busting a family game. Write tasks on Ping-Pong balls. Each person chooses a ball, completes the task, then chooses another one. After 30 minutes, whoever has the most balls gets a prize—like a no-chores day or control of the TV remote.

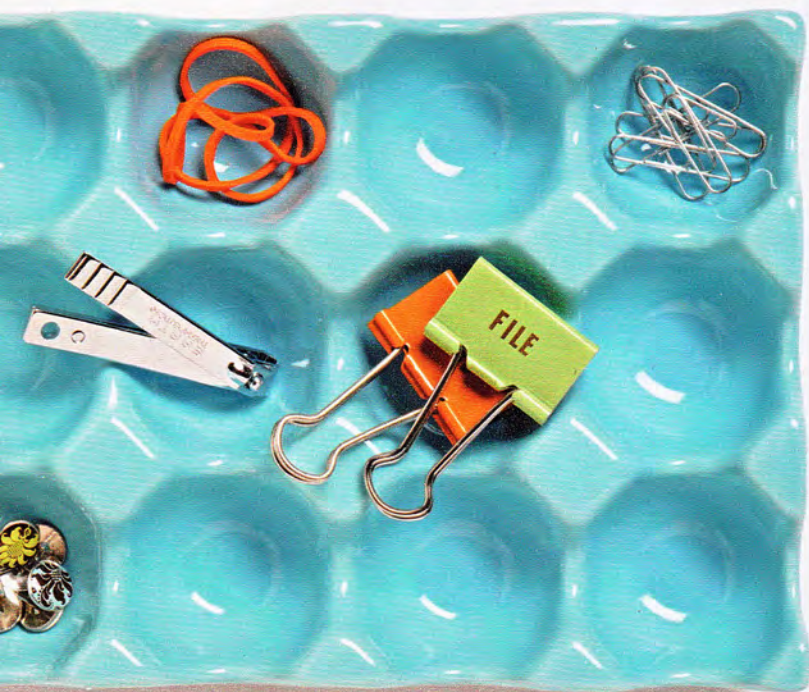
Alicia Rockmore and Sarah Welch
authors of *Pretty Neat: Get Organized and Let Go of Perfection*



Fifty-nine percent of women surveyed say that donating to a charity is their preferred way to get rid of unwanted items.



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14 Get creative with storage containers. Try a ceramic egg tray for paper clips and rubber bands, *left*; a tackle box for craft supplies; a napkin holder for incoming mail; and a garden tote for kids' art supplies.

15 Make two coffee dates with a good friend. On the first one, go through her kitchen cabinets to identify and get rid of clutter (lidless plastic containers, mismatched glasses, petrified spatulas, etc.). On the second date, do the same in your kitchen.

Alicia Rockmore and Sarah Welch

16 If you're having trouble letting go of clutter, whether it's too many things in your house or too many commitments eating up your time, think about what it requires you to sacrifice. Less stuff means less to organize and less money spent. Fewer activities means less running around and more family time.

Laura Wittmann, author of *Clutter Rehab*



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17 “Go clean your room,” can mean lots of things. Give your kids a list of exactly what you expect, and let them check off the tasks as they are done.

Scott Roewer

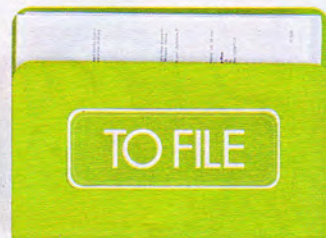
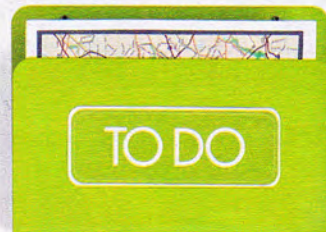
18 Fit a cardboard banker’s box with 13 pocket folders. At the end of the school year, go through your child’s artwork and school papers together to select only as many favorites as will fit in one folder. Memories from an entire school career will fit neatly on a shelf.

Julie Morgenstern

19 Keep a folder labeled “Tax Documents” where you sort your mail. As statements come in, slip them into the folder. When tax time comes, everything you need is in one spot.

Meredith Schwartz

20 Perform daily triage on incoming papers and mail. Set up a desktop file box or wall-mounted file holder, right, with three folders: To Read, To Do, and To File. Sort the keepers into one of the categories, then recycle the rest. Schedule a weekly time to deal with the contents of each folder.



Tired of imitation *Vanillas,*
Coffee Bean finally found
the natural beauty he was looking for.

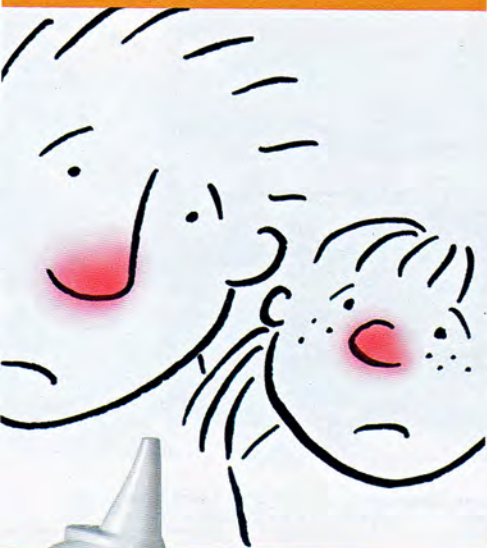


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21 Is your linen closet overflowing? Pare down your stock to three towels and washcloths per person, two sets of sheets per bed, plus a set of each for guests. *Voilà!* A roomier linen closet.

Laura Wittmann

22 Procrastination breeds clutter. Institute a do-it-now policy for a few highly visible everyday tasks—like loading the dishwasher or folding and putting away a load of laundry before starting another.

Aby Garvey

23 Designate a separate, labeled bag for each regularly scheduled activity, lesson, or sport on your family calendar. Pack the bags with the necessary gear, and hang them on hooks in a handy spot.

Alicia Rockmore and Sarah Welch

24 If toys are overrunning your house, quietly tuck a few of them away in a box. If kids ask for a specific item, retrieve it. After a month, donate what's left in the box.

Scott Roewer

Go Online

Ever wonder how your personality impacts how you organize? Go to BHG.com/storagequiz to find out your storage personality.

25 Attics, basements, and garages tend to harbor lots of items you haven't seen or used in a while, which also makes them prime candidates for purging. Clear them first so when you tackle your living areas, you'll have storage space waiting. ■

Debbie Lillard