

GET IN THE HABIT OF DECLUTTERING

Say goodbye to piles of stuff and hello to an organized home.

BY DALENE ROVENSTINE

R AISE A feather duster if this sounds familiar: You're scrolling CleanTok in bed once again and come upon your favorite influencer reorganizing the space under her bathroom sink, or maybe her pantry. Not only does it look easy to execute, but it also looks beautiful—even if it's ultimately shut behind a cabinet door. Inspired, and frustrated with the constant clutter in your own home, you decide to reorganize. Then you run out of steam mid-project. Or you finish, but you find the shelves overflowing again a scant two weeks later.

If you're struggling to keep your home clutter-free, it isn't because you're not as organized as that social-media neatnik. The problem is that you haven't taken the time to create a personalized (and sustainable) system. We spoke with two decluttering experts about how to get into the habit of maintaining an organized home.

Assess Your Space and Your Sentiments

Whether you want to organize one room or your entire home, it's essential to look at what's working and what's not. This doesn't mean measuring for plastic bins—it means taking a deeper look at what's behind the mess.

"The clutter that we have is often tied to our past or our fears and our identity, our hopes, our plans," says Faith Roberson, owner of the New York City-based professional organizing company Organize with Faith and author of *What Stays and What Goes*, to be published in April 2026. "Being aware of what you're not happy with and how it's reflected in your home is the first step."

Write down what in your home bothers you, like the pile of laundry in the corner or the stack of mail by the door, and also write how you feel about it. When people reach the point of needing to declutter, it's often because they're overwhelmed or frustrated, says Laura Wittmann, owner of the *I'm an Organizing Junkie* blog and author of *Clutter Rehab*, which comes out in March 2026.

Understanding why you have clutter and why your previous organizational attempts weren't up to snuff will help ensure that your new strategy is successful.

Tackle the Whole House—Together

Unless you live alone, the mess and disorganization isn't just yours. Bring in your spouse, children, or roommates at this initial stage. Just as you are recording how your home is making you feel, encourage your partners in the household to do the same.

Even if you're the residence's Type A inhabitant, you can't simply assign tasks once you've established a plan. A strategy that works for only one member of the household doesn't allow everyone to have ownership and is not a long-term solution.

If you have children, it's crucial to involve them in the process. "There are a lot of organizing skills that have to be practiced as children: caring for space, managing what they have when they get new stuff, taking old stuff out, getting familiar with different charities that they're passionate about, and also being mindful of their own acquisition," says Roberson. (For more on teaching kids to clean, see page 78.)



Create a Personalized Organization System

Keep recording your household clutter frustrations daily until you understand the underlying issues and can make an action plan. As a household, outline the areas or rooms you'll tackle, how you'll approach them, and a timeline. (If this feels overwhelming, you may want to enlist a trusted friend or a professional for support.)

Don't worry about "baskets and bins," says Wittmann. As you build out your plan, she recommends identifying whether a space is cluttered due to too much stuff, the lack of an organization system, or both. Find a new "home" for everything. For example, if your

spices are scattered throughout the kitchen, choose one area in the kitchen where they will live.

As you identify homes for groups of items, consider the amount of time you spend with them. Those items you use daily should be the most accessible. It's not just about keeping car keys by the door or chargers near plugs: Think of your cabinets, closets, and pantry in this way, too.

Above all, functionality should be top of mind—not how pretty something looks.

Activate Your Plan, When You Can

With an action plan ready, it's time to begin. Unless you've hired professional help or blocked off two weeks for organizing, this will likely be a slow process. To stay motivated, look for small wins, such as sorting areas that are visible first

(such as a coffee table or a bookcase).

When you start on an area, no matter the size—whether it's one shelf or an entire closet—remove everything from it. Once the space is clean, you will have a fresh perspective on how to reorganize it. Sort through the items and decide what you'll keep, move to another area, toss, or donate.

"It's not really about making it so that it fits in the space," Roberson says, "but more making it so that it fits in with your life."

Commit to Decluttering

As you organize, space by space, you and your family will need to make hard decisions. If you overload these spaces again, the system will fall apart, just like it has in the past. Wittmann recommends purging until you're left with only what you really need and what fits in its planned home.

If you find yourself struggling to let go of items, find an accountability partner (maybe a friend with similar goals) who can check in during the initial decluttering and over time.

"The goal should be less stress, less chaos, less tripping hazards, less hassle, and less piles," Wittmann says.

Make Decluttering a Habit

With your system in place, you may need to make minor tweaks (more on that in a bit), but you should be able to maintain a junk-free home.

Just like with setup, your





long-term strategy is not one-size-fits-all. Do what works for your family. Roberson offers the following as a starting point to make staying on top of clutter a habit:

DAILY Do the dishes, sort through the mail, and take out the trash and recycling.

WEEKLY Handle laundry and pay attention to clothing you never wear when putting it away. Refresh your fridge and pantry when you unload groceries.

MONTHLY Clear cabinets to wipe down shelves, and reevaluate what you have before putting items back.

SEASONALLY Peruse your special occasion items—holiday

decor, fancy china, decades-old tablecloths—and if you haven't used them in more than a year, it's time to toss or donate.

In addition to a calendared cadence, give yourself occasional cues to declutter, such as reviewing your closet when you buy a new item or checking your medicine cabinet when you pick up a new prescription.

Keep a donation box handy so anyone in your home can add items to it at any time. Establish a schedule for dropping it off, such as every time you pass by the thrift store. It might also help to create recurring goals, such as everyone in the house putting three items in the donation box every week.

"Whatever kind of system you create, get the clutter out of your house on a regular basis," Wittmann says.

Update as You Go

Elements of your new system may break initially—and that's okay. Keep an eye on what works and what doesn't. If you find an area overflowing again, you probably need to reassess that space. Are there too many items? Is the space too far from where people use the items? Sometimes it's easier to shift the area—such as moving a laundry basket closer to where the kids leave their clothes—than trying to force a system that isn't working.

As you refine your organization system, you may even find items you kept that you're ready to part with now. If the upkeep of your items becomes too much—either emotionally or physically—"you have too much," Roberson says, and it's essential to address that.

If you find yourself falling behind on your regular decluttering schedule, look to major events such as a new job or the end of the school year to initiate a reset. As your needs change, you may need to change certain aspects of your system. For example, as your child grows, the toy box may be replaced with storage for sports equipment.

"There is literally a system to fix every problem," Wittmann says. "We just have to be a little gentler with ourselves, lose the guilt and shame, and make our homes and our spaces work for who we are as people."

Some of these techniques may take time to become ingrained, but with practice and repetition, keeping your home clutter-free will become easier over time. ●