



DECLUTTER

And Sin No More

Jane Phinney & Shifrah Combiths

The Best Decluttering Tips of All Time

Jane Phinney

Decluttering your home is not just a way to make your space look more neat and tidy. It is also a powerful strategy to improve your mindset, reduce your stress, and enhance your well-being. In this article, we will explore the benefits of decluttering, the challenges that may arise, and the best tips and methods to achieve a clutter-free home. Whether you are a minimalist or a maximalist, you will find some useful and practical advice to help you transform your home and your life.

- Start by removing trash and sorting items into three piles: keep, donate, and toss.
- Avoid dumping small things on tables and invest in hooks, catch-all trays, and under-bench storage.
- Divide and conquer the mess by taking everything out of the area you want to organize and editing before you organize.
- Store fewer products and relocate extra towels, occasional-use products, first aid, and medications into labeled bins in your linen closet.
- Make a decluttering plan and schedule 20-30 minutes to clear out a single drawer or zone.
- Group similar items together and find a specific home for everything you intend to keep.
- Be smart with storage and use drawer dividers, shallow bins, cubbies, or labeled baskets to keep your items organized.

Learn from experts. Read on for Shifrah's primary tips.

Shifrah Combiths

With five children, Shifrah is learning a thing or two about how to keep a fairly organized and pretty clean house with a grateful heart in a way that leaves plenty of time for the people who matter most. Shifrah grew up in San Francisco but has come to appreciate smaller-town life in Tallahassee, Florida, which she now calls home. She's been writing professionally for twenty years, and she loves lifestyle photography, memory keeping, gardening, reading, and going to the beach with her husband and children.

Decluttering is just editing your home. And since your home story is always being written, decluttering is a never-ending task.

The reward—and the reason that keeps me going when decluttering seems like an overwhelming task—is that at the end, your home will contain only the things that serve

you. You'll be surrounded by things that make you happy. Because just like editing, once the extra, unnecessary stuff is deleted, only the best is left.

How To Clean a Smelly Kitchen Sink Drain

“Keep what you need and what makes you happy” is enough of a north star for some people. But many of us need a little extra guidance to help decide what's worth keeping.

These 27 time-tested decluttering tips can help.

1. Don't treat your home like a storage unit.

Keeping something because you might need it someday is like paying mortgage to a storage company—and it comes at the expense of living in an empty, breathable space. So think twice about hanging on to the curtain rods or the six old cell phones.

2. Realize that what you keep costs you a lot.

Many times, you're tempted to hang on to things because you feel like it's a waste of money if you should ever have to buy them again. But there's a cost to keeping something. You need to think about where to store it, give up the actual storage space, or take up precious empty space. Then you'll need to spend time organizing it and then remembering where you put it and when you need it, and then putting it away, organizing it again when it gets messy, and well.... you get the picture. Is that item really worth the time and effort it's going to take to keep it?

3. Give yourself permission to buy again.

Since the thought of having to part with money down the road is painful, you may choose to keep many things that you may not otherwise. But the simple but powerful conscious act of giving yourself permission to buy again down the road (with the knowledge that you're gaining so much now by letting go) will help you get so many more things out of your home.

4. Touch it once.

So much clutter comes from holding on to things that need action. Keeping the “touch it once” principle at the forefront of your mind will help you build smart practices. For example, standing by the recycling bin with your handful of mail as you sort it and signing those permission slips as soon as they come. This cuts down drastically on paper clutter, take-it-upstairs clutter, and more.

5. Ask yourself if it's "the best, the favorite, or necessary."

This decluttering mantra coined by Emily Ley helps you narrow down your possessions to the cream of the crop. If you're looking at an overly large collection of mixing bowls, for instance, narrow it down to the best ones. A kitchen towel collection can similarly be whittled down by choosing to keep only the favorites.

6. Ask yourself if it's useful or beautiful.

"Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful." Adhering to this famous saying attributed to William Morris is a good way to avoid accumulating excess.

7. Ask yourself if it sparks joy.

Marie Kondo has become a cultural standard-bearer of a movement to declutter and minimize. Her famous shtick is having people ask themselves if each and every single belonging in their possession sparks joy. It works for some (including me), and if it works for you, it's a galvanizing way to let go of so many things.

8. Recognize that the important part of a gift is the act of giving and receiving.

It's so hard to get rid of gifts. You appreciate the thoughtfulness shown in getting and giving you something and you wouldn't want to dishonor that in any way. But if the gift itself is something you don't need or enjoy, it's okay to let it go, guilt-free. The transaction of love and care—what makes the gift meaningful—has been taken to heart.

9. Keep a box in your closet.

This super simple trick is disproportionately powerful. The idea is that every time you put something on and don't feel good in it, you toss it in the box. It's an in-the-moment, painless way to declutter your wardrobe.

10. Practice one-in-one-out.

Promise yourself that with each new thing that comes into your house to stay, you'll get rid of one other thing. It helps keep your storage-math straight: You shouldn't accumulate one single "extra" thing if you truly stick to this rule. Having a designated "outbox" for the items you'll donate or give away (as opposed to just toss), helps you keep the habit.

11. Use the 90/90 rule.

The Minimalists' 90/90 rule has you ask yourself if you've used the item in the last 90 days and if you will use it in the 90 days to come. If the answer to both is no, out it goes. The

actual time of 90 days is flexible, and you can adjust it to whatever suits your lifestyle, but the framework helps you decide whether an item is as necessary as you might think.

12. Use washi tape to declutter your kitchen.

To decide what's worth keeping in the kitchen, set a designated length of time, such as six months or a year, to give you a chance to see what tools you actually use. You'll know which items pass the test by sticking a piece of washi tape or masking tape to each thing at the start of your experiment. When you use the tool, peel the tape off. At the end of the time, get rid of any unused thing that still has tape on it.

13. Declutter by area.

Looking at one freshly cleaned-out space might inspire you to declutter the rest of your home, too. So keep the momentum going by decluttering deeply in small areas, instead of decluttering a little at a time all across your home—because at the end of the latter, you have a full bag of donations, but no specific peacefully-decluttered space to point to. For instance, you could decide to declutter—all the way—the junk drawer or a particular cabinet in the kitchen.

14. Go on a decluttering binge.

On the other hand, an empty garbage bag or donation box might be just the thing to spring you into action. If the idea of filling it with things you no longer need inspires you, get to work. Don't forget to put it in your car to get it completely out of your house.

15. Employ the “Ex Test.”

This mind trick helps you evaluate how important something really is to you and it goes like this: Would you contact a detested ex (romantic or otherwise) to get the item back? If not, then it can't be that important. Say goodbye.

16. Ask yourself if you'd buy it now.

Asking yourself, “If I were shopping now, would I buy this?” is so useful. It will help you cull your collection of things down to only what's serving you in your present life. The question will help you shed clothing that's no longer “you,” no longer fits you, “useful” items that are not part of your current life, and broken things that—be honest—you are never going to fix.

17. Try the hanger trick.

This decluttering hack is similar to the washi tape one, only this time you're turning hangers around in your closet. Commit to a specific period of time, say three months, and get rid of anything you haven't reached for and worn within that time span. You won't have to think

and remember, because you have the hanger trick: If all your hangers hook over the bar right now, flip the hanger so it hooks from behind when you hang every worn-it-already garment back up. At the end of your time period, donate what hasn't been turned around.

18. Shop for others.

Rather than approaching decluttering with the mindset of finding things to get rid of, consider instead what you could part with—books, clothes, craft supplies—so that others can have it. This takes the sting out of parting with items and the fresh tactic could renew your efforts to lighten your own load.

19. Pretend you're moving.

This one's a mental exercise: Pretend you're moving from one apartment to another, and you need to pack everything up, pay to have it moved, and then unpack it. Use this mental framework to scan your closets and storage spaces—if you see an item that you wouldn't go to all that effort to keep, get rid of it right now.

20. Paper stacks begone with a three-pronged approach.

To work through paper clutter, create three options for each paper you handle: shred, file, recycle. By confining your options, you force yourself to actually deal with the paper piles you've been avoiding. "File" includes storing digitally.

21. Try the 10 percent method.

The 10 percent method works especially well for those who have a hard time letting go of what they own. The key to the method is being able to see everything that belongs to a certain group of items. For instance, your shoes. Pull them all out and into one space and then make it a goal to reduce the total number by 10 percent.

22. Do a little bit at a time.

"Little bit" can vary, but the idea is that you put a parameter on your time and energy. You can do this by designating a certain area you'll work through start-to-finish (as long as it's not a huge one) or by pre-determining a set amount of time. This way you won't sabotage your big-picture decluttering efforts by burning yourself out before you really even get going.

23. Remember what you gain by letting go.

Decluttering opens the door for some pretty great things. You gain space, time, and energy, among other things. Keep your eye on the prize and use the motivation to redouble your decluttering verve.

24. Limit yourself.

One way to decide how much to keep and how much to set free is by setting a limit on how much space you'll take up with that one category of items. For instance, if your collection of t-shirts is spilling out of the two drawer dividers you designated for them, pare down.

25. Don't buy containers or organizers until you purge.

Buying baskets and bins and dividers is my favorite part, too, but if you have these around before you declutter, you risk organizing stuff you don't need and that's risky. Purge before you splurge and then get exactly and only what you need to organize what's left.

26. You won't start liking something you never liked.

You might have perfectly useful hand-me-down lamps stuffed in your closet because it feels wasteful to get rid of them, but you don't really want to use them in your own home. The solution is simple: Out they go. You aren't going to suddenly start liking them. But someone somewhere out there will.

27. These two common pitfalls aren't reasons to keep things.

Having something for a long time or something being valuable does not mean that you have to keep it. The same criteria (useful, beautiful, joy, etc.) apply just as much to these types of items as to anything else.

My Heart Undressed is an outreach of IOM America. Jane's articles can be found at <https://drstephenphinney.substack.com/>