

# LET GO OF CLUTTER

Professional organizers offer tips on donating, selling, and recycling all the items you don't want to keep in your house anymore.

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## HOW DO I DECIDE IF I SHOULD SELL OR DONATE THE ITEMS I WANT TO GET OUT OF MY HOUSE?

**JAMIE NOVAK** This is one of the questions that trips people up. You know you don't want to keep an item, but what are your options? When you are unsure, you tend not to do anything. Look at the potential profit versus your time spent organizing a sale or posting an item online.

**LAURA SOUDERS** If you just want to be done with it all, then your decision is really easy: Donate it.

**SHERRI CURLEY** Selling is more time consuming than dropping off a donation or arranging a donation pickup. Do you have the time? Patience? Motivation?

**KATHY VINES** If you have access to the market where someone would buy it, try to sell it. But set limits about how long you will try to sell it and how low a price you would be willing to accept.

## WHAT CAN I DONATE? HOW OFTEN SHOULD I GO TO THE DONATION CENTER?

**JULIANNA POPLIN** Don't donate stained clothing to an organization that's going to resell it unless you know they have textile recycling. I would ask them before drop-off.

**KATHY VINES** Throw out anything that is broken, damaged, stained, or well beyond repair. Don't donate your underwear.

**JAMIE NOVAK** I like to talk about the sister-in-law test. If I would give it to my sister-in-law exactly how it is, then I would feel comfortable donating it. Throw it out if it doesn't pass this test.

**SHERRI CURLEY** Before heading out to any donation facility, call ahead or check updated websites to verify acceptable items, current protocols, and hours of operation.

**JAMIE NOVAK** Think seasonally when you are donating things. Most organizations require you to bring seasonal items in advance because they don't have the storage space to keep them all year.

**LAURA SOUDERS** Take items as soon as you have a carload. If you get rid of stuff right away, you can appreciate the space that you have earned from all your hard work.

**JULIANNA POPLIN** Many people find it helpful to get items out of the house immediately so they aren't tempted to go back through a bag.

**JAMIE NOVAK** If you are in the middle of a big purge, I would say go to the donation center on a weekly basis or a monthly basis at a minimum. Taking three bags somewhere seems more doable than 20 or 30.

**SHERRI CURLEY** If you are extremely overwhelmed or don't have a car, try to opt for organizations that have pickup services. You can just set your stuff outside your front door or in your garage and arrange a date for them to come pick it up.



## HOW CAN I GET IN THE HABIT OF DONATING ITEMS MORE OFTEN?

**KATHY VINES** I always want people to have a permanent box or location in the house where things they are ready to let go of can go. When you are doing laundry and you see something that's too small, you can put it right into the donation box rather than waiting until you go through the whole closet later.

**JAMIE NOVAK** You are bringing new things in all the time, and you should have old things going out all the time. Maybe you drop off things whenever you go to the grocery store because it's right down the street. Or schedule a donation pickup at the beginning or end of every month.

**JULIANNA POPLIN** I love using the pickup option. It helps me set a deadline. Once I'm on their list, they might call and tell me they are going to be in my area, which is great because then I think: *What can I go through before they get here?*

## OUR EXPERTS

**SHERRI CURLEY**, professional organizer, The Practical Sort; Portland, Oregon

**JAMIE NOVAK**, professional organizer; Los Angeles and Northern New Jersey

**JULIANNA POPLIN**, professional declutterer and blogger, The Simplicity Habit; Seattle

**LAURA SOUDERS**, professional organizer, Healthier Spaces Organizing; Middletown, Pennsylvania

**KATHY VINES**, professional organizer, Clever Girl Organizing; Melrose, Massachusetts

Please see "Meet the Pros," page 90, for contact information.

## NEED HELP GETTING RID OF YOUR STUFF?

### 1. DONATE

- **buynothingproject.org**

Managed through Facebook, these groups are local, so there's no need for shipping.

- **freecycle.org**

Join a group in your area, post an item, and let someone come pick it up.

- **donationtown.org**

Enter your ZIP code, view a list of charities that pick up donations in your area, and schedule a pickup date online.

### 2. SELL

- **decluttr.com**

Sell your phones, tablets, and other electronic items.

- **poshmark.com**

This is a good place for selling mass-market clothing and accessories your consignment shop might not take.

- **therealreal.com**

Sell designer handbags and clothing here.

### 3. RECYCLE

Find more information about what you can recycle at:

- **earth911.com**

- **epa.gov/recycle**

- **recyclenation.com**



## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO SELL MY UNWANTED ITEMS?

**LAURA SOUDERS** What really seems to get quick results for people is Facebook Marketplace. I see people putting furniture, toys, clothing, and all sorts of things on it. Plus, you aren't paying anyone else a fee; some other sites take a cut.

**JULIANNA POPLIN** I personally like Facebook Marketplace or Facebook Buy and Sell groups in my area. I don't really enjoy shipping. It takes more money and time. If you have true collectibles where you need a very narrow audience, it can be worth it to do eBay or something.

**SHERRI CURLEY** I often suggest going to a consignment store. It's potentially much quicker than selling online. You don't have to worry about taking photos, and you don't have to meet up with a stranger somewhere.

**LAURA SOUDERS** Yard sales are good if you have a lot of items and you're not tied to a certain price. If you have a good location, you can see a lot of traffic, but you are going to spend a lot of time getting things set out. You should expect to have a lot of items left when you are done, so have a plan for donation at the end.

**JULIANNA POPLIN** I think garage sales can help people declutter more because they have a target date when they need to have it done. Garage sales can work well for most things. You just have to price them pretty low.

**LAURA SOUDERS** If you're not savvy with a computer and don't have experience selling things online, find a teenage neighbor or grandchild and tell them you'll split the profits with them if they help you sell your things.

## HOW CAN I EASILY KEEP TRACK OF ALL THE ITEMS I AM SELLING?

**LAURA SOUDERS** I like to sort items according to where I am selling them. I would suggest putting a date on each item when you list it and keeping all of the items on a shelf so they're ready for you to pull when they sell. If you have the date you listed an item, you'll know you listed it back in May and you can ask yourself if you should keep trying to sell it.

**JAMIE NOVAK** You need one dedicated space in your house for all of the items you are listing; otherwise you run the risk of misplacing them or accidentally donating them. It could be one bookcase or one shelf, but you should group them by where they are listed. Label the edge of the shelf as to where they are listed, and on the item place a sticky note with the price, the date that the listing went up, and where you plan to donate it if it doesn't sell. This is also where you could store any shipping boxes you would need if an item sells.

**JULIANNA POPLIN** Creating a spreadsheet can be really helpful, especially if you are selling on multiple platforms. It's a good idea to keep track of everything so you don't have people contacting you about things you sold months ago. Be sure to set deadlines for selling stuff so you don't have a bunch of things over a long amount of time. Give yourself a certain amount of time to sell it; if it doesn't sell, then donate it. If you're short on space, just give yourself a month and price it to sell.

**JAMIE NOVAK** Yes, have an out plan if it doesn't sell. I will say to myself or a client, "We are going to list this item for 14 days, or I'm going to have it up for sale for 30 days. If it hasn't sold by then, I'm going to take it down and donate it here." I might even suggest scheduling the donation pickup for the day after you say that you are not going to sell it any more.

## WHAT TYPES OF ITEMS CAN BE RECYCLED? WHERE DO I GO TO RECYCLE THEM?

**JULIANNA POPLIN** What you can recycle varies so much depending on where you live. Check with your city about your city's guidelines.

**KATHY VINES** Contact your waste management company because you might be surprised to find that they take things you didn't think they would. Don't just assume a rule that applies to your cousin three states over applies to you. You might have different rules.

**JAMIE NOVAK** Amazon has a trade-in program for electronics. You tell them what you have, and they give you an Amazon gift card in exchange. Staples stores offer a collection point for just about any type of old electronics. You want to be sure to wipe your personal information from it before you take it in.

**LAURA SOUDERS** Habitat for Humanity will take a lot of building materials, such as leftover tiles and old cabinets. Some will take paint.

**SHERRI CURLEY** I like to refer to the pyramid of reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle. Recycling is admirable, but it's on the bottom of the pyramid. The goal is first to reduce what you bring in, and second to repurpose or reimagine what you have before buying something new.

**JAMIE NOVAK** Is it possible that a year from now you will find out about a great recycling option for an item you threw in the trash? Possibly, but you would have had to save it for another year. Just try to make the best choice with the best available information. Don't let fear of future regret stop you from decluttering.

