

spring forward

FRESH IDEAS TO JUMP-START YOUR SPRING CLEANING



Fresh linens, fresh flowers, and a fresh coat of paint: there's nothing like spring cleaning to clear away the physical and mental cobwebs of winter. Photo courtesy Pratt & Lambert Paints.

by margaret doss

Out with the old, in with the new—spring is the season of fresh starts. In April, thoughts turn toward simple pleasures like actually being able to walk in that walk-in closet. Experts agree that clutter can increase stress and affect the quality of our lives, so the annual ritual of spring cleaning and ridding the home of cobwebs may clear the mind as well.

For many, the biggest challenge is simply deciding where to start. Although bringing order to the chaos of your closet may seem the logical choice, don't overlook some of the less obvious spaces.

PARK YOUR CAR, NOT YOUR CLUTTER

A major part of spring cleaning is getting rid of clutter and the garage is a real clutter magnet. Lisa Greenup with Closets by Design believes garages are especially tough to put in order because they must serve a variety of purposes while working around some major challenges. "Garages need to be functional, but you've got to work around a lot of obstacles like cars, sprinkler system controls and garage door rails," she says.

If you're not up to tackling it on your own, a professional organizer can help you streamline the garage as well as organize that closet. Greenup says that the "objective eyes" of a professional often find storage opportunities in areas a homeowner wouldn't think to use. And since garages often handle sports equipment and woodworking tools in addition to everything automotive, a customized system of shelving units, deep cabinetry and workbenches are often a necessity if you want to squeeze out the maximum amount of storage from your space. Greenup notes that deep cabinets and creating a categorized system of storage cuts down on frustration, and she favors systems with cabinet doors for a cleaner look.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE NOOK

A common residential feature is that practical desk area located near the kitchen and designed as a convenient work area for busy moms.

Professional organizer Jennifer Humes, known as the Clutter Queen, calls this the "nook" and adds that it is usually one of the worst organizational offenders of any home. She explains that when people don't establish a central location for all of their things, everything that doesn't belong in another obvious location commonly ends up here—children's artwork, pens, markers, recipe books, random scraps of paper and, well, junk.

According to Humes, there's a simple process to getting control of a chaotic space like the notorious nook. First, clear the entire surface, sort the items and purge what you don't need. Then, put back the items you decide to keep in a clearly labeled, functional container. One product she highly recommends for the nook area is a magnetic strip bulletin board by Three by Three Seattle. The narrow size fits neatly in the area underneath the cabinet generally found in the nook, and the wide variety of available colors creates a pleasant display for photos, notes and keepsakes you don't want to hide.

LINENS TO SPARE

Debbie Van Zant with Edited Home has no trouble pinpointing the cause of our organizational woes. "Clutter is the most invasive thing," says Van Zant. "Everybody has too much stuff."

Nowhere is this overabundance more apparent than in the linen closet, a space Van Zant categorizes as "very challenging." Towels may start as fashion statements designed to coordinate with an individual bathroom, but over time, color scheme changes and renewed supplies make the linen closet a haven for past-its-prime cotton. Sheets can multiply over the years, too, especially for bargain hunters who just can't pass up a good deal.



BEFORE (above): Garage clutter bringing you down?

AFTER (below): A system for shelving and categorizing your goods can take a home's worst eyesore from floundering to fabulous.



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Simplification is the easiest way to tame the linen closet.

Thankfully, styles have changed over the years and the look for towels now has become more utilitarian. Van Zant advocates paring down the towel collection to focus on one set of good quality towels in a neutral tone like white that can be used in any bathroom. Her recommendation? "Think of a spa—very clean, organized and Zen-like."

Spring cleaning is also a good time to pare down the sheet collection, a task that requires a critical eye. If the sheets no longer fit a room's color scheme or décor, don't waste the storage space on them. While you're at it, give yourself a "reality check" regarding how many spares you actually need. "Nobody needs 15 pairs of sheets," Van Zant says. "How many Ralph Lauren fitted sheets without a top sheet can you really use?"

PASS IT ON

Does the idea of throwing out something that you paid good money for sound worse than living with the clutter? Professional organizers say there's one magic word: "donation."

The idea of someone else putting our worn goods to better use is an incentive that usually helps. "Clients who have an especially hard time letting go find it easier if I tell them they should pass the bounty they've been given on to others who need it," Van Zant explains. Humes, a big fan of recycling, notes that nearly everything can be of use somewhere. For example, she suggests periodically weeding out the plethora of pens, pencils and markers that are rarely used in your home and donating them to schools, shelters or nursing homes. Local animal shelters always need old towels, and chances are, no matter what you're getting rid of, there is probably a charity that can make use of it. If this sounds like one of your hang-ups, Humes offers the reminder that keeping something you don't use not only wastes your space, it keeps it from others who would both use it and be grateful for it.

SOLD!

If all that culling leaves you with objects of value that you no longer want or use, a newer service to consider is AuctionDrop, an eBay drop-off service. "The rule of thumb for AuctionDrop is 25

pounds or less and a resale value of \$75 or more," says CEO Randy Adams.

Anything that fits this criteria may be dropped off at any of the many UPS Store locations in the Metroplex. Items are then packaged and sent to an AuctionDrop processing center to be evaluated, researched, photographed, and listed for sale on eBay. Once the auction ends, the company handles payment, processing, shipping, and then sends you a check. It charges a flat rate of 30 percent on sales below



Windows and blinds are easy to let go over the course of a year, but they can accumulate a substantial amount of dust, dirt and allergens.

\$500 and 20 percent on sales above \$500. Reportedly, 92 percent of all things listed sell, and most transactions are completed in two weeks. "It's a win-win situation," Adams boasts.

Curiously enough, AuctionDrop now has more than 3,400 locations nationwide and Adams says he got the idea for the business after his wife asked him to clean out the garage and post everything on eBay. Now, we're guessing he's glad he did. ■

Note: Ann Reisfeld Boutté contributed to this article.

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