

## Lifestyle

## Messy home? Tips for decluttering

BY MELISSA CACERES  
Staff writer

Clutter happens when we least expect it. With the absence of basements and minimal attic space, many people in South Florida find themselves buried in stuff accumulated through the years.

Avoid falling into the packrat habit with these tips:

**Set aside a block of time and focus on one task.**

Even if it's just 15 minutes during the day, begin to work on one small area. A drawer is a good place to start, says Catherine Gallagher, owner of ORGANIZED4GOOD, an organization company in Fort Lauderdale. Try not to tackle more than you can handle. "Complete a small task, gain confidence, and then move to a larger space like a dresser, pantry, hall closet, etc.," she said.

**Find a use for every container.**

One mistake people usually make is buying containers and storage items before they figure out how they are going to use them. Like any product, purchase containers only when you can answer two questions: Where are you going to put it, and what are you going to use it for? If you can't answer both, it will end up as clutter like everything else, says Diane Hatcher, owner of Time-Savers Professional Organizing Services in Cooper City.

**Get rid of what's not needed.**

"Items are not gaining any value by sitting in a closet or garage," Hatcher says. With more spendable income, people lose sight of what they need and purchase items because of the short-lived good feeling they get from buying, she says. Learn to discard items that you've been holding on to but don't have use for anymore. Keep what you love and what currently adds value to your life.

**Keep an extra box around for donations.**

There may be several items around the house that aren't needed but could be useful to someone else. Gallagher advises to wait until the container gets filled up with items and drop it off at a nearby charity or donation site. "If it is a 501-C3 charitable organization, they will be happy to give you a receipt you can use for your taxes," she said.

**Don't put things down in random places.**

Put it away instead of putting it down, says Beth Levin, owner of the Miami Beach-based organization company, Closet Queen. It's easy to get into the habit of placing a coat on the couch, or leaving a pile of mail on a counter when you come home from a long day. Move household items to their place the moment you have your hands on them. If the scattering gets out of hand, Levin suggests picking things up as you go about your day, moving from room to room.