

Reduce your stress by reducing your clutter

Do you often spend hours looking for things?

Have you ever discovered a box full of items that you haven't looked at, or needed, in years? Do you avoid certain dark corners of your home or garage because you just can't deal with the mess? Are you moving in the next few weeks and want to avoid moving carloads of stuff you don't need? If you answered yes to any of these questions, don't stress out, the steps below will help you reach junk-free nirvana.

Sort, separate and store

The first step is the most difficult and time-consuming— sort through the mess and separate it into three categories: stuff you don't need anymore, junk you never needed in the first place and useful items that you forgot you had.

Now that you know what items you want to keep, store them in suitable containers that you've clearly marked with a label. This is where a good electronic labeler comes in. Electronic label makers date back almost 20 years to when Brother introduced their popular P-touch brand. Today, they can be purchased in most office supplies stores, or online at places like www.brother.ca. "We encourage our customers to use colour coding to organize multiple storage boxes," says Marc Ruel, product specialist at Brother Canada. "It may seem strange, but they report that they get

addicted to their labelers." However you do it, creating a system that works for you will make it that much easier to stick to.

So now that you know what you've got, where are you going to put it?

Give useful items a home

Resist the temptation to put all those boxes back in the same shelf in the garage; give them proper homes instead. The best way to determine where something should go is to put it near similar items. Stray tools go near screws, bolts and hardware. Gardening gloves and tools go near seed leftovers and bulbs. Camping gear? Meet fishing gear.

Sell or donate what you don't need

If you're like most people, you'll be left with all sorts of things you just don't need. Now's the time to join forces with your neighbours and have that massive garage sale you've been putting off for years. An electronic labeler will come in handy here too. With so many items for sale, buyers will appreciate that your items are all clearly price-tagged— negotiable of course. Everything that is left over goes to the Salvation Army or your local thrift shop.

Nothing against yoga, massage or long walks in the park, but if you really want to de-stress, de-clutter: nothing clears the mind like clearing the pile of junk that's accumulated in your cupboard.

—News Canada



Is your air conditioner up the job?

Before the heat waves hit, make sure your air conditioner is able to battle the high temperatures.

Dave Walton, Director of Home Ideas at Direct Energy offers the following tips to ensure your air conditioner is primed and ready to cool your home effectively and efficiently.

Central air conditioning systems are a great choice. To reduce annual energy bills, install a high-efficiency central air conditioner with a 13 SEER rating, which uses up to thirty per cent less energy than older 10 SEER units.

Make sure your central air conditioning system runs efficiently by keeping it clean. Have your system checked annually by a licensed professional and replace the furnace's filter every three months. Also, be

sure to hose off the outdoor unit and keep debris such as leaves and grass clippings away. Plant flowers and shrubs at least 24 inches from the outdoor unit.

The life expectancy of a durable system is approximately 15 years. Make sure the warranty offers at least 10 years on the compressor and five years on all other parts.

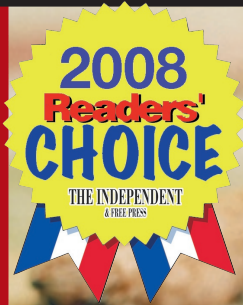
Prevention is the best medicine. Consider purchasing an air conditioning protection plan, like Direct Energy's Cooling Protection Plan. For just a few dollars a week, you'll be covered for most repairs and replacement parts. You'll also enjoy priority service if you require a service call.

More information on this topic is available online at www.directenergy.com or toll-free at 1-888-334-8221.

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