

Banish closet clutter -- It can be done!

Expert organizers show you how to sort and simplify

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We all wish our usually messy, disorganized clothes closets could look great all of the time, but Heather Knittel and Susan Borax have taken this longing one step further.

They happily admit that closets are their passion, and they've made it their business, too, by founding Good Riddance Professional Organizing Solutions (goodriddance.ca).

Knittel and Borax love collecting factoids about women and their closets. They get a kick out of studies that show, for example, that American women would rather organize their closets than lose weight (Rubbermaid, 2005). And that one in three IKEA customers say they get more satisfaction from cleaning out their closets than from having sex.

But, mostly, Knittel and Borax love helping out with closet clutter. Here are their tips.

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Starter tips

1. Ask yourself these questions when thinning out your closet. Would I buy this again? Do I enjoy wearing this? If the answer is "no" then just let it go.
2. Store bed linen in your bedroom closet. Keep matching pillow cases and fitted and flat sheets inside one of the pillow cases. This will keep co-ordinated pieces together and the bedding will be at your fingertips when you need to change the bed.
3. Egg cartons make great, inexpensive drawer trays to hold earrings and other jewelry, and you can stack them on top of each other.
4. Stop buying things until you've organized the things you already own! You may realize that you don't really need to buy anything new.
5. Whether you work alone, with a friend or a professional, make sure that you allow yourself sufficient time (between three and six hours, depending on the size and volume of your closet) and that you have a strategy in place, particularly for distribution and disposal.

Sorting and categorizing

6. Before you decide what type of closet-organizing system to implement, you need to decide what to keep and what to discard. This step takes the longest and generally requires removing



CREDIT: Wayne Leidenfrost, The Province
Susan Borax (left) and Heather Knittel, who have mastered the art of turning a cluttered closet into a well-organized dream wardrobe, share their expertise.

everything from the rods, shelves and the floor of the closet for evaluation. Ask yourself: Are you keeping something out of guilt? Has your lifestyle changed? Do you need the same type of clothing? Do you have duplication?

7. Consider what, exactly, is crowding your closet. A quarter of your clutter may be empty hangers and dry-cleaning bags. Also remove the empty boxes, shopping bags and items unrelated to your wardrobe.

8. Eliminate anything that doesn't fit, is out of style, worn, torn or that you never wear (such as mistakes you bought on sale). Get rid of shoes that hurt your feet or back. Toss worn-out and unmated socks.

9. Remove out-of-season clothing to another location or high shelf.

10. Decide whether the clothing you need to access is better hung, kept in a drawer or on a shelf.

11. Create categories of the clothing you are keeping -- by item, colour, function or length.

Finding your things a good new home

12. Once you have decided that your excess clothing and accessories no longer have a place in your life, it's critical to dispose of them through sale, trade or donation. Don't leave discards hanging around. You might be tempted to take them back.

13. Take gently used clothes to consignment stores or sell them on-line (www.2chicksconsignment.ca).

14. Attend or organize a clothing swap. It's a great way to update your wardrobe for free and have a fun evening out. Swapping is another good way to keep textiles out of landfills. Good Riddance organizes clothing swaps as fundraisers for non-profit organizations.

15. Donate excess clothing to charity, such as a women's shelter. Some charities will even pick the clothes up from your home. Organizations like Dress for Success support women who are re-joining the workforce by supplying them with outfits for job interviews.

16. For that suit you never wear because the skirt is too snug: split up the pieces, tossing the skirt but keeping the jacket to wear as a blazer. Repurposed garments are less likely to wind up in the garbage.

Keep your closet looking fabulous

17. Closet-organizing tools are available in many styles, materials and price ranges. You need to create a solution that reflects your taste, needs and budget. Closets in older homes and apartments typically consist of a rod and a single shelf -- aptly described as "a hole with a pole." There are many options for increasing capacity. You can install rods on multiple levels, and add drawers and shelving.

Use clear storage bins with labels.

Use shelf dividers, baskets and drawer-organizer inserts to keep garments neat and orderly..

If you rent, consider portable organizers that you can take to your next home -- for shoes, handbags, jewelry, belts and sweaters.

Before installing any permanent features, measure the amount of space you need for each category -- for example, coats, suits, pants, jackets. Call in a design specialist to assist.

18. Don't fill up all the available space in your closet. Leave some room between the clothes and on the shelves to provide visual relief.

19. Use the same style hangers (but not those metal ones from the drycleaner). Group clothes according to length and sort by colour.

20. If you use an item a lot, keep it close and accessible. If not, relocate it. Have three places to relocate the clothes you do not use often:

A) Another closet

B) Dresser drawer

C) Stacking storage bin

E) Don't forget the back of the door for added storage space.

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