Decluttering For the Holidays

With the holiday season in full swing, many Oklahomans are making the trip to the attic or storage building to bring out the decorations. Boxes of ornaments, wreaths, the family heirloom nativity set and other items are a must for your holiday decorating.

But if your home already is cluttered, adding more to the mayhem can be stressful. The front hall closet is likely stuffed with winter wear that has seen better days. Other storage areas such as attics, garages and unused bedrooms may be filled with plastic storage tubs that are full of who knows what. With Christmas right around the corner, many people will be adding to the contents of their home with new gifts they receive.

While some people do put learning a new skill or starting an exercise program on their New Year’s Resolution list, it can be a good idea to make a resolution early this year and clear out the clutter before putting up your holidays decorations, said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

“Decluttering your home can be a tough job to get started, but once it’s done, you’ll be glad you did it,” Peek said. “When all the extra stuff gone, you’ll be amazed at how easy it will be to maintain.”

As with any project, it is a good idea to set goals. Be specific in what you want to accomplish. Is your main goal to clean out the spare bedroom that has been used as a collection point for a while? Or is it something as simple as cleaning out the junk drawer in the kitchen? Whatever it is, write it down. You may even find it helpful to put project-completion dates on the calendar to help hold yourself accountable.

Sometimes tasks can seem unsurmountable, so it is a good idea to identify small projects that will provide a lot of satisfaction. Pick one area, whether it is the corner of a room that has served as a catch-all, a shelf in a closet or even a stack of papers that have been on the dining room table for a while.

“Don’t try to do too much all at once or you’ll be overwhelmed. Instead, take baby steps and work in small increments of time – say 30 minutes,” she said. “Completing a few smaller tasks will hopefully give you the boost you need to tackle larger jobs.”
As you begin clearing out the clutter and come across things you no longer want to keep, place these items in boxes labeled trash, storage, donate and for sale. Use these for sorting as you declutter. When you finish cleaning an area, follow through quickly with getting the items to their final destination. If your closet is stuffed with clothes you no longer wear, donate them to those who can use and enjoy them now. For example, find women’s shelter where the clothes can be donated.

Check with local schools to see if they are having a coat drive. There are lots of places to donate gently used clothing. “Some local charities will come pick up donations. Check around your area to see what groups will do home pickup,” she said. “Set a firm pickup date and this will get you energized to get as much stuff gathered as possible. And an added bonus is you won’t have boxes and bags just sitting around taking up space until you have time to get them delivered.”

Peek said if you have a habit of piling things on any flat surface in your home, make an effort to clear off reason that have become catch-all spaces, such as counter tops, dining room tables and night stands. These areas are known as hot spots. Manage your home’s hot spots before they accumulate clutter. To help keep clutter under control, institute the one-in-one-out rule. For every new book you bring into your house, let one go. Donate it to your library or other charity.

You couldn’t resist the sale and bought new shoes? Get rid of a pair you already own. Do the same with clothes and other items you purchase. “With the holiday season in full swing, hosting a gathering at your home can be a great motivator to clear out the clutter,” she said.

“No matter what the reason, you’ll see how satisfying it is to keep your home clutter-free and organized all the time.”

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**Simple Hot Cocoa for One**

**Ingredients:**
- 2 TLB unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 Or 2 TLB sugar
- Pinch salt
- 1 C milk or half and half
- ¾ tsp vanilla

Wisk together cocoa, sugar, salt and 2 TLB milk over medium heat until cocoa and sugar dissolve. Wisk in the rest of the milk until it is hot. Stir in vanilla. 194 CAL.

If you like Frothy, blend in blender
Tackle the piles of paper in your home

It’s the beginning of a brand-new year. When things are new and fresh, it’s easy to get motivated and make some New Year’s resolutions. What’s on your list? Losing weight? Exercising more? Clearing out the clutter? Getting in better financial shape?

According to the website tripsavvy.com, four of the top 10 New Year’s resolutions involve something to do with health, clutter and financial fitness, said Cindy Clampet, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension family resource management assistant specialist.

“The holiday season can bring a lot of extras – extra food, extra company and even extra mail. You may have spent more money to prepare holiday meals and extra treats. Leftovers may have accumulated in your refrigerator,” Clampet said. “With all the hustle and bustle of various celebrations, that pile of mail can easily stack up and get overlooked. Dealing with your mail in a timely manner is important because an unpaid bill in the stack can quickly become a late bill.”

It can be easy to let the clutter in your refrigerator and on your counter or desk impact your finances. These are just a couple of reasons why getting physically and financially healthy, as well as getting a handle on the stacks of paper are so important.

Clampet said one reason so many resolutions that are related to health, finances and organization fail is because people try to bite off more than they can chew.

“The trick to success in these areas is to start slowly and do just a little bit each day. In exercise or dieting to losing weight, saving money or getting out of debt, or organizing and clearing out your clutter, no step is too small to get started and it is never too late,” she said.

To get started, sort just one of your piles of paper. Sit down with that pile and go through each piece. You might put a small waste basket nearby, so you can throw away any junk mail. Immediately file anything that needs to be kept. If you come across a bill, pay it right then, either online or write the check. Get the stamps out and put those ready-to-mail bills in your purse or bag for mailing tomorrow!

“To help keep your enthusiasm from waning, tackle another paper pile every couple of days,” Clampet said. “If you try to do it all at once, you’ll get overwhelmed and quit. Take baby steps and you’ll eventually reach your goal.”

The beginning of a new year is a great time to start budgeting your money. With fun budgeting apps on your smartphone, it can be easier than ever to track your spending and saving.

Clampet suggests trying an app called Every Dollar or another one called Mint. Both are free and fun to use.

“Don’t worry if you don’t have a smart phone or aren’t technologically inclined. Good old paper and pencil will work just fine,” she said. “The important thing is to start a budget because it will show where your money is going.”

Start by listing and adding up all your income. Next, list your expenses. Be sure to include everything such as house payment, utilities, student loans, retirement savings contributions and emergency savings. Don’t forget about payments that may not be monthly, such as quarterly tax payments, car insurance and even things such as
Back to school expenses. Add up your expenses and subtract them from your income. Hopefully there is money left over. If not, your choices are to either increase your income or trim expenses.

"Putting a budget down on paper really gives you a visual of how your money is being spent and will help keep you from overspending in any one category," she said. Making big changes is hard. Making small change is easier and becomes a habit more easily. Then those good small habits can more easily become good bigger habits.

**OHCE**

January 23rd: Leader Lesson at Muskogee Extension

February 14th: Executive Meeting; Extension Office

Leader Lesson for February: Attracting Butterflies and Hummingbirds

Hello OHCE members, my name is Janis Risley and I will be the FCS Educator for Wagoner and Mayes Counties beginning February 1st. I am looking forward to meeting everyone. I believe we are going to have a great year.