

welcome!



Welcome to Lesson 1 of Clear Out the Holiday Clutter. I hope you had a joyful holiday season. This lesson, along with Lesson 2, is all about clearing out the holiday clutter—returning your home and life back to pre-holiday order. Since everyone's time schedule and desire to clear out the holiday clutter is different, the final two lessons of this workshop are released on the same day. However, take your time and tackle your holiday clutter on a time schedule that works for you.

If you're ready to wrap-up the holiday season, these next two lessons are a welcome relief. If you're like me, it isn't the holidays themselves that are so stressful...it's the aftermath! All that clutter—from gift boxes and gift wrap to the gifts themselves, and that's just the start of it! Then there are all those holiday decorations that at the start of the season seemed so pretty, but now seem to be causing the walls in my home to close in on me.

I realize you may be on the other end of the spectrum...dreading the task of putting the holiday gifts and decorations away, because it means your favorite time of the year has come and gone for yet another year. That's OK, too. Because regardless of where you weigh-in on this issue, I'm willing to bet there's one thing we can all agree upon: getting ready for the holidays is much more fun than finishing them up and putting them away. Do you know what I mean?

That's where clearing out the holiday clutter comes in. My goal with these final two lessons is to make the business of putting away the holiday decorations and gifts more fun than in years past. Together we'll systematically reclaim our homes, plus share tips and ideas for making next year's celebrations a notch more organized. Here's how we'll do it.

In Lesson 1 our focus will be on finding space for the new things that have come into your home as a result of the holidays. We'll put away the gifts and clear-out that first layer of holiday clutter. We'll carry on with our theme of gratitude, and make a list of thank you notes to send. Next, we'll do a reality check and talk about the strong temptation to keep gifts we've received, even when deep down we know the item itself won't work for us. Then, we'll reclaim our living spaces...step-by-step, little-by-little.

In Lesson 2, we'll continue to reclaim our homes by putting away our holiday décor. I'll share organizing and storage ideas for your holiday items. Plus, I'll share simple ideas for making next year's holidays even more organized and joyful than this year.

Are you ready? Let's get busy clearing out the holiday clutter!

WHERE DID ALL THIS STUFF COME FROM?

For some reason, it happens to me every year. I go about my holiday preparations...shopping, wrapping, decorating, baking...joyfully engaged in the process. Then, at about eleven o'clock on Christmas morning I look around and see nothing but chaos. A mountain of gift-wrap here. A pile of gifts there. Decorations that just the day before looked pretty and quaint...now seem bulky and obtrusive. "Where did all this stuff come from?" I wonder.

Well...some of it came home with me on that gift shopping trip. Some of it arrived in boxes from out of town relatives. Yet more of it came home in the trunk of the car last night, after the celebration at Grandma's house. Even in years when it seems like we're cutting back and doing less, I still find myself bewildered by the amount of stuff that has made its way into my home...stuff that now I have to find a home for.

simple tip

If you feel this year, as I have felt in the past, like there's just a tad bit too much, make note of this in your holiday planner. Jot down how many gifts you purchased this year and who else gave gifts to you and your family. (This is the one piece I tended to forget in the past...my kids weren't just getting stuff from me, there are three sets of grandparents, plus aunts and uncles who give them gifts, too.) The main point here is to capture what feels like a comfortable target for gift-giving next year. Then, let's start putting it all away.

WHERE WILL IT ALL GO?

Regardless of where all the stuff in your midst came from, it's here now, and it's our job to do something with it! Here's a step-by-step approach for finding homes for all your new stuff.

step 1 Focus on gratitude.

Before you get busy putting it all away, step back and reflect. Regardless of how big or small the pile of Christmas goodies is—there's an awful lot to be grateful for. Sit with that for a minute. Just really sit back and drink in all the goodness of the holiday experience—gatherings with family and friends, quiet moments, laughter, music, festive decorations, yummy food, gifts and most of all, loved ones to share it all with you.

If you already have a gratitude journal, pull it out now. Or you can simply use the Holiday Clutter-Clearing Action Plan. Then, write down all that you're grateful for. Just spend a few minutes reflecting quietly and taking note about the season that just passed. (I don't know about you, but I feel better already.)

Next, pull out your thank you note list, and write down the gifts you and your loved ones received and who gave them to you. This will be easier to do now, while the holidays are still fresh on your mind and the gifts are in your midst to remind you what everyone received. With your heart full of gratitude, and a thank you list in your hand, let's move onto Step 2.

step 2 Do a reality check.

A big source of clutter is unused and unwanted gifts. There's an almost instinctive temptation to keep gifts we've received whether or not we like them or will use them. It's a gift after all. So even if you know in your heart of hearts you'll never wear the holiday Teddy Bear sweater from Aunt Ruth, you feel a sense of obligation to hold onto the sweater. "It's from Aunt Ruth," you lament, "I love Aunt Ruth."

Remember this: you can be grateful for a gift (and love the person who gave it to you) without keeping the gift forever (or even for a few days, for that matter.) Really. I know it feels awkward and icky, but holding onto an item you really don't love, just keeps the awkwardness and icky-ness in your midst for months or years to come.

Write Aunt Ruth a thank you note to tell her how much you appreciate her thinking of you. Then, if Aunt Ruth included a gift receipt, put it to good use. Return things that just don't work for you or exchange these items for something you will love and use. If there isn't a gift receipt, donate your unwanted items to charity or a friend in need. Or...consider hosting a present swap with friends. Regardless of how you decide to pass on your unwanted gifts to someone else, give yourself permission to do so.

“ Keep this in mind. Unloved and unused gifts equal clutter – both physically and in your mind. Free yourself from this burden right away. ”

This is a sample of *Clear Out the Holiday Clutter*—an eBook from simplify 101. To purchase the full eBook, visit www.simplify101.com.