



Spring Cleaning for Mind and Home: Declutter and Refresh

After a long winter, spring is finally here. For many people, the idea of spring cleaning feels both refreshing and daunting—and clutter is often the reason why. Whether it's the overstuffed closet, the basement corner you've been avoiding, or a garage full of "I'll deal with it later," finding the time, energy, and motivation to begin can be the biggest roadblock. But clutter doesn't just take up space—it can affect both physical and emotional well-being.

What Is Clutter, Really?

According to an online dictionary, clutter is defined as “a disordered heap or mass of objects” or “a state of disorder.” Clutter often includes items you no longer use or care about, things left out instead of put away, or belongings that simply don't have a designated home. When clutter grows so extensive that it disrupts daily routines or creates safety concerns, it can become a serious issue.

It's important to note that hoarding is a real medical condition that requires professional treatment and is outside the scope of this discussion. Here, we're focusing on everyday clutter that most people experience.

Why Decluttering Matters

If you've been reluctant to declutter, consider the benefits. A clutter-free environment can save both time and money. When things are organized, you avoid the frustration of searching for misplaced items or repurchasing things you already own.

I learned this firsthand last summer when I couldn't find the charger for my trimmer. After giving up and buying a new one, I later discovered the original tucked away in a pile. Now, the replacement has a designated home—saving me from making that mistake again.

Clutter can also take a toll emotionally. A cluttered room can serve as a constant reminder of unfinished tasks, creating mental noise that makes it difficult to focus. Over time, this ongoing distraction can contribute to stress and overwhelm.

Where to Begin

Getting started is often the hardest part, but several simple strategies can help you make progress without feeling overwhelmed.

The Spurt Method

One helpful approach is the *spurt method*, which involves taking just 5–15 minutes at different times during the day to pick up and put away stray items. These small bursts can fit naturally into your

routine—before your favorite show starts, while waiting for the coffee to brew, or just before bed. Over time, these little efforts add up.

The Four-Pile Method

Another effective strategy is sorting items into four distinct piles:

1. **Pitch/Trash**
2. **Donate, Sell, Recycle, or Gift**
3. **Put Back**
4. **To Be Determined** (used sparingly)

While using this method, try to follow the OHIO rule: **Only Handle It Once**. When you pick up an item, immediately decide which category it belongs in. Try not to return it to the clutter with the intention of deciding later—that’s how piles grow again.

Looking Ahead

If you're interested in learning more about how decluttering can positively impact your physical and emotional health, keep an eye out for an upcoming spring workshop offered through Illinois Extension. It's a great opportunity to explore practical strategies and find support as you refresh your home and your mindset.

About the Author

[Sara Attig](#) is a Family Life Educator with University of Illinois Extension, serving Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties. Attig uses her expertise to deliver impactful and meaningful programs about the dimensions of wellness, aging, and much more to Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties and beyond.