

Is it Spring Yet??

A dose of summer weather earlier this month had us all looking for (or at least thinking about) our shorts and sandals, right? If you were one, then you are already on your way to organizing your closets for the new season. Spring is the classic time to revisit what lurks in our closets (entry, clothes and storage) with an eye to the warmer months ahead. Also, the extra hour of daylight this month requires that many of us adapt our high-traffic spaces to accommodate outdoor sports equipment and the proliferation of footwear! Embrace "Clean Out Your Closet Week," happening this month, for a fresh start to the new season.

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Organizing Your Closet: Fight the Beast Within!

For most of us, our storage and clothes closets don't have enough space, are designed poorly for the way we use them, and inevitably become a clutter trap soon after we've straightened them out. How can we fight what seems to be a losing battle? A simple approach is to look at your "beast" from a new point of view, and ask yourself: "what goes on here?" If you answer honestly, keeping in mind your lifestyle today, you'll begin to develop a strategy for each storage problem that is sure to win every time.

- Create More Space – To maximize your storage space in each closet, first evaluate the purpose or function for that closet and be sure you store only related items. Are there things in your walk-in closet that have nothing to do with getting dressed? As an example, your main clothes closet may contain unrelated things like linens, boxed photos or recreation equipment. (One friend told me that her husband stores his scuba gear in their bedroom closet just to keep her clothes from migrating to his side!) The goal is to designate an appropriate home for all unrelated belongings (closer to point of use) and move these items out. Multi-use closets can be streamlined by establishing a section or shelf for each category, and storing items based on need and user.

- Maximizing Design Limitations – If we're lucky we have closets that are custom made for our things. If not, you can mimic a custom look by making a few changes designed to maximize use. For deep, narrow closets with a sloping ceiling (a common residential storage dilemma under stairs) consider a mobile cart of deep drawers (Elfa-style) that is easily removed to reach items stored behind it.

Other ideas for aiding problematic closet layouts:

- Add a second rod designed to hang below the top rod; this product doubles your hanging space and is sold at stores – no handyman required!
 - Install additional hooks to house frequently used items that tend to get piled;
 - Add shelf dividers (clear or wire) to create a boundary between piled or stacked items (sweaters, handbags);
 - Place a small chest of drawers below short hanging clothes; this additional storage is helpful in deeper closets with fewer shelves;
 - Investigate other space enhancing products such as belt rings, scarf hangers and multi-pouch organizers sized for handbags or shoes. Clear pocket (shoe) organizers can also be used for jewelry and small items. These products maximize space in small closets and help you find things easier.
 - Upgrade your inefficient “one rod, one shelf” closet design with an inexpensive, multi-shelf/rod system that can adapt to your needs. Ask for a free closet design at your local home improvement store. If anything, this will give you new ideas.
 - Replace inefficient bi-fold doors with ones that have full hinge extensions. You'll be amazed at how this increases your space and accessibility.
- Avoid the Clutter Trap – The key to eliminating clutter is to establish a simple storage system that works for every user, and most importantly, is easy to maintain. In closets, actively used shelves are often hard to manage because contents are routinely used, replaced, and often seem to multiply. Minimize cluttered shelves by sorting items, designating a shelf for each category, and containing each category in open, labeled containers that can be easily removed and replaced. If needed, label the shelf at first to train each member of the household as to where things belong. (Do this in office environments too!)

This works well for a hallway or storage closet packed with frequently used items such as personal care products, utility items (flashlights, batteries, light bulbs) or other supplies. Creating a labeled container for each category avoids piles and frustrating spills, and allows you to see everything you own. This method also reduces the need for duplicate purchases, thereby saving you money.

These planning guidelines are most effective when you've done your best to rid your closets of items you are not longer using or belong elsewhere. Once you've defined a plan for what really needs to be there, sort items by category and purge those that don't support your current needs.

Wardrobe Basics: Who's ready for an image update?

How often have you sifted through a bulging rod (or two) of hanging clothes and said, "I have nothing to wear"? This may indicate that you are ready and in need of a wardrobe audit, which is simply an honest review of what you wear (or don't) and why. Who wouldn't be interested in defining their "style DNA," especially if it helps us to stop buying clothes that we will never wear, and convince us to part with clothes that do nothing for us? Certified Image Consultant Maryann Bastnagel, owner of *My Good Black Pants*, performs closet audits for individuals, both men and women. In a wardrobe audit, Maryann reviews and discusses many topics, including body type and shape, image goals, and practical clothing ideas for your current lifestyle. A wardrobe audit helps you "achieve wardrobe clarity" and sets you up with a plan to dress successfully every time. According to Maryann, "if you can't see it you won't wear it." To reduce accumulated clothes, ask yourself these questions as you look at each piece:

- Do I love it?
- Does it flatter me?
- Does it help portray the image I want?

Making decisions about what to keep or toss is easier if you know that:

- It doesn't fit;
- It's clearly dated (out of style);
- You haven't worn it in 12-18 months; or
- It doesn't match the image you want to achieve.

For more information on the benefits of a wardrobe audit, and for details about other services available through *My Good Black Pants*, contact Maryann at mbastnagel@comcast.net.

Wardrobe Basics: Other Tips for Clothes, Shoes and Off-Season Storage

Clothing Tips – How do you remember when you wore something last? One trick is to start the season with all hanging clothes placed on the rod in the wrong direction. As you use an item, replace the hanger as you normally would on the rod. At the end of the season you'll see what clothes you actually wore, based on the direction of the hanger. If you have difficulty letting go of clothes, this is an effective technique for measuring what you don't use (or like!) and selecting items for the giveaway bag. Teach this simple trick to your friends and family members if they have bulging closets and find it hard to purge clothes they never wear.

Also, replace wire hangers with good quality hangers of a uniform size and style. Well made hangers (wood or plastic) allow clothes to drape properly and create space between pieces so you can see everything at a glance. Good hangers are worth the minimal investment and are more affordable if you purchase them in bulk at online or retail locations. When you decide to review your clothing, hang pieces sorted by color (just like in the stores) for easier retrieval.

Shoe Storage – Get current-season shoes off the floor using these ideas for easy storage and retrieval:

- Use clear shoe boxes, labeled and stacked on a low shelf or in cubbies;
- Place an open shoe rack, with 3-4 shelves, on the floor below short hanging clothes;
- Hang a shoe rack or shoe bag (multi-pocket) on an inside wall or closet door;
- Place a basket on the floor for casual shoes of similar type (sneakers, pool and beach shoes).

Seasonal Swap - If you have already developed a system for an easy exchange of seasonal clothes and items, the next step is to plan a few hours to make the swap, tweaking your system as needed. If not, here are some tips to make room for your summer-season wardrobe:

- Store out-of-season shoes in clear, flat boot boxes. Several pairs fit in one box and the boxes stack well or fit nicely under beds;
- Pack off-season clothes (sweaters, pants, suits) in clear containers (deep sweater boxes) or clear plastic/fabric hanging bags to protect from dust;
- Dryclean or hand wash sweaters prior to storage to eliminate pest damage;
- Store off-season items on high shelves in your closet, or underneath a bed.

WDC-Area Community Resources: [DMB Pictures](#), [Community Shred Event 3/31/07](#)

Personal Photo Documentaries: [DMB Pictures](#). Need a new gift idea for someone who has everything? Or how about just another reason not to re-do those yellowed photo albums? Take your old photos and home movies collecting dust in your closet and turn them into something wonderful—a lasting memory for generations to come. Preserve your family history with a personal documentary from DMB Pictures.

DMB Pictures is owned and run by Bethesda resident and Emmy Award-winning television producer, Debbie Brodsky. Debbie will come to your home or place of choice and film a sit-down personal interview with you or a loved one. DMB Pictures will then help you sort through relevant pictures, transfer film movies, and create a beautiful documentary film honoring you or a loved one's life. A personal documentary is a perfect gift for a milestone birthday or anniversary and future generations will treasure this for a lifetime. The documentary format adds a warm and personal touch to screen at any occasion, including retirement parties and weddings.

A typical photo documentary package includes a one-hour filming session of the subject(s) and a 10-15 minute film that includes highlights from the interview and family photos set to music. DMB Pictures can also create movies from your photos and transfer old home movies onto DVD.

For more information, email info@dmbpictures.com or visit <http://www.dmbpictures.com> to view a sample of Debbie's work. Mention you read about DMB Pictures in *Clearing House Organizing News* and receive 10% off your entire project. (Up to a \$250 value.) Now is never soon enough to capture the personality you love so much – because everyone has a story to tell!



Community Shred Day, Saturday 3/31/07. Sponsored by *Shred-It*, NBC4 and Mercantile Potomac Bank, this "Safe and Secure" event is a great way to get old papers out of your space and protect yourself from identity theft. Bring up to five boxes of your personal papers to one of two locations and they will be shredded for **FREE!** (No business or commercial material will be accepted.) Accepted materials include all types of papers (staples and paper clips ok), empty binders, unwanted or expired credit cards, and computer disks.

Locations:

Mercantile Potomac Bank
702 Russell Ave
Gaithersburg, MD 20877
Hours: **8am-11am**

Mercantile Potomac Bank
3914 Centreville Rd
Chantilly, VA 20151
Hours: **8am-11am**

Pass this information along to friends or family members who may need a little nudging to get those files cleaned out! Details at <http://www.nbc4.com/sponsors/5340872/detail.html>.

Earn Free Organizing Hours from Clearing House! As *Clearing House* approaches the end of its' third year of business, we want to thank you for your past and continued efforts at spreading the word about our services. If not for your kind words and your personal referrals to friends and relatives, *Clearing House* would not be growing as it is today. To show our appreciation for providing the best marketing campaign out there – *personal testimonials* – *Clearing House* will credit you one free hour of hands-on organizing service for each new referral that becomes a client.* So continue to spread the word about the benefits of becoming organized, and earn enough hours to maintain your organizing "fix." Everyone needs a tune-up now and then!

Enjoy Your Spring!

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* The one-hour credit will be applied to a scheduled 3-hour organizing session. Please contact *Clearing House* for information about our new rates, effective 4/1/07. Current rates will be extended to existing clients through 6/30/07.