

Closet secrets: get ruthless

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To start, designate each closet for certain items only and stick to that. Your first sorting task will be to get everything out that no longer belongs.

And because we often have too much stuff for our space, you're going to have to ask yourself some tough questions about what remains in order to pare down, Veldhoven says.

Below, Veldhoven tackles some of the usual cluttered closets and suggests ways to improve the way we use the space.

FRONT CLOSET

We know what's supposed to be there, so how does everything else get shoved there, too?

The items here should reflect what you need when you come and go out of your house — coats, boots, mitts and hats in the winter, maybe a dog leash (if it's kept neatly in a basket on the shelf). And definitely you need enough room to hang a visitor's coat so that it won't be a crumpled mess when he leaves.

UTILITY CLOSET

Often located in a kitchen or maybe a back porch, this is the place where extra household items get dumped — batteries, light bulbs and paper towels; the tool box, even. Think of this closet as the place for household supplies and repairs, and keep everything else out.

HOME OFFICE CLOSET

Ideally, this is where you'll find neatly stacked shelves of paper, envelopes and toner.

More typically, this makes a good combination closet. Designate half for shelves for office supplies. If it's big enough, consider storing your filing cabinet in there as well.

Then use the other half for overflow from a bedroom closet. A little hanging space here for seldom-worn formal wear, off-season clothes or shoes will keep the clutter to a minimum in the all-important bedroom closet.

LINEN CLOSET

This is often the tiniest closet in the house, even though most of us have years' worth of sheets and towels in them.

To tackle organization here, start by getting rid of the mismatched, holey, pillaged sheets, as well as the frayed,

stained or too-worn towels you've had hanging around since college. (Your local animal shelter would likely be only too glad to have these cast-offs, so put them to good use by donating.)

A good general rule? Count the number of people at home, the number of beds and the number of bathrooms. Veldhoven says she tends to keep three or four set of towels in rotation for each bathroom and three or four sheet sets for each bed, but she considers that generous. Figure in how many folks actually use these items, take a good look at the space you have and come up with a realistic number. Really, you could have just two sets of sheets to a bed — one to use, one to wash — but they'd wear out sooner.

CHILD'S BEDROOM CLOSET

Here, aim for a combination closet so everything can be put away neatly in one spot.

Remember, little people wear little clothes, so they don't need as much room as the big people in the household. A typical two-metre closet (five to six feet long) should be ample room for clothes, toys and books. Use baskets for toys and a shelving unit for books and make sure hanging rods are within easy reach.

ADULT BEDROOM CLOSET

OR MASTER BEDROOM CLOSET

Usually, this is the closet most people find the most frustrating to do something with — chock full, as it usually is, with fat clothes, skinny clothes, clothes you haven't worn in 10 years, purses, ties, suitcases, sheets, those books you plan to read — the list goes on.

Veldhoven's basic rule? "This is the biggie," she says. "The master bedroom closet should only be for clothes."

Here's why: Our bedrooms need to be a restful, relaxing haven, and that means a clutter-free zone. Sure, you can close the door on the mess while you sleep, but every morning when you're getting dressed, you'll be reminded again of the disarray.

Again, start by getting rid of all the stuff that isn't clothes. Then take a good look at what's left and start purging and sorting.

When you're finished, you'll be able to start shopping for hanging rods, baskets, shelves and cube towers that will make sure your space is never out of control again.



This closet in a home on Moran Street in Halifax, with plenty of storage space for a hobby sewer's supplies, was reorganized by Jane Veldhoven.

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