

# FUNCTIONAL FASHIONABLE 6



## For Earth's Sake, Get Organized!

In preparation for my upcoming presentation at the DC EcoWomen annual conference this month, I've been thinking a lot about the environmental benefits of being organized. You might think that saving things rather than discarding them is good for the environment. This is sometimes the case.

The truth is, though, that the basic principles of organized living support the tenets of being green. And there are, of course, eco-friendly ways to make your home more functional and more fashionable. It's all about finding the right places for your existing belongings and making plans to reduce future consumption.

The first step in drawing order from chaos is the all-important "purge." Disposing of large quantities of stuff sounds wasteful but, done thoughtfully, it is actually the very definition of efficiency. Many organizers advise you to sort your belongings into these categories:

- Keep
- Donate
- Sell
- Trash

Items that you keep will continue to serve a purpose for you and your family. Donated items will benefit others in your community. Sold items also help others, with the added benefit of a profit for you. Only trashed items are environmentally harmful. Ensure that your trashed items are few. In addition to the above-mentioned four categories, also create piles to:

- Recycle
- Shred

Anything in working order that you are unable or unwilling (due to time or logistical constraints) to sell is eligible for donation. Goodwill, for instance,

takes all sorts of clothing, books, music and household items. You might also consider offering things to libraries, schools or shelters.

It's critical that you securely dispose of sensitive documents — anything displaying your social security number, or financial or medical information — by shredding it. Just remember that the shredded materials are recyclable.

There's a common misconception that letting go of clutter means throwing away things of value. In fact, when items are disposed of conscientiously, they are actually set free to take on increased value. Unused, unloved items are redirected to new homes, where they will actively serve a purpose or be converted into something else that does so. Not only does this benefit recipients, it also eliminates the need to dedicate resources to the production of a brand new item. In this way, secondhand markets reduce overall resource consumption.

But these at-large efficiencies, though compelling, are not the only benefits of de-cluttering. They are also felt on an individual level. How many times have you purchased something only to discover you already had one — or more — at home? How many perishable items have you had to throw away unopened? When we finally take time to empty out our closets, pantries, attics and garages, we get a full picture of what we already possess. By taking stock of what we have and organizing it in a logical, accessible manner, we cease to over-buy. We save money by eliminating unnecessary purchases, and we save time searching or shopping for the things we need. We re-allocate existing products, thereby saving natural resources — all while providing for our local and global communities.

For young children who are resistant to the idea of cleaning out their bedrooms, framing the subject in an Earth-friendly vein may just help your cause. Kids now are taught in school to be environmentally conscious and often come home with all sorts of dictates for how the household

must be more greenly managed. Organizing their own belongings is one way they can take personal action. Talking with your family about mindful consumption is an opportunity to impart valuable life lessons — not only about the environment but about personal organization skills and responsible financial management.

Your tech-savvy children are well equipped to contribute in an even greater way to household efficiency. Today technology presents some of the best opportunities for saving natural resources, as well as your time, space and money. Next month we'll explore some of the creative ways we can use electronics to get organized and go green.

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