

June, 2009 30 Day Clothes Challenge

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I have been working on my June newsletter for most of May. A very detailed clothes organizing challenge, with tasks for each day of June. I had an epiphany while reading the Sunday paper this morning, though... I realized most folks don't want to purge their clothes right now, or shop to replace stuff. We just want to better use what we have, to get the most of what we already own. So I hope to help!

Summer is here to stay, no more cold weather clothes till Fall. So it is time to clean out that closet! A friend used to take a day off once or twice a year to "Clean the Closet", which to her meant a chance to consider her image; to look at where she was in life, where she had been and where she wants to go.

Week 1: SETTING THE STAGE

Believe these words: You deserve to wear clothes in good repair that flatter you. Do not settle for tattered or stained clothes just because they are there. Do not scrounge through drawers filled with clutter to find one item that you really want. Your time is worth more than scrambling daily to get dressed, to find something presentable to out on. Invest some time in YOU this month. It is better to have a few pieces that really work for you than a closet full of stuff you don't or can't wear.

Assess what is and what is not working. Drawers? Do you actually put things away? Or would open shelves work better for your stuff? Would you be better off with hooks instead of hangers?

Assign a home for donations, and for off-season and treasure clothing (prom dress? Old bowling shirt, etc), probably not in your bedroom closet unless it is really big.

Invest in 3 or 4 Bins, like Rubbermaid or Sterilite 18 gallon bins, and Reusable / transitional labels for bins (Like these [BinBuddies from Organized A to Z](#)).

Take those new bins, and put post-it notes on them. These are for items to leave your closet. They may say "Winter Clothes", "Maternity", "Donate", "Cleaners", "?? size (too big or too small)".

Do all the laundry. Start to finish, set a timer if you must.

Put your laundry away. All of it. From all over the house. Yes, really, all of it. And yes, your closet and drawers may be stuffed, but we'll fix that soon enough.

Week 2: PUT THINGS TOGETHER

Make some room in your closet. Pull out all the empty hangers, and set them aside or recycle them. Remove all coats to your coat closet. Grab that "Winter Clothes" bin(s) and pull out all the specifically winter stuff from the closet and your dresser drawers. Tackle that in the Fall, using this same process!

Tackle all projects the same way. **First and foremost, pick a path and stick with it.** I recommend left to right.

Meaning, we start every project, organizing or otherwise, to the immediate left of the entrance door. We never have to ask "Where to Start?", and we can tell where we paused in the middle of a project, because there is a distinct line between organized and not-yet-organized. You can also try right to left, top to bottom, etc.

Now that you have some cleared some rod space, sort your current clothes into categories or colors, whichever works for you. I prefer categories, all the skirts and shirts and tank tops and suits grouped separately. I have a client that would put all black clothes together, all brown, all red, etc.

Sort within categories, too. Once you have put all the pants together, then you can sort by color, or season, or size, or where you might wear the item (casual vs. dressy).

Pull out the items that need some work done – dry cleaned? Hemmed? A button here, a new zipper there. Invest in the items you already own, and take them to the cleaners or a tailor (often the same place!). And make a note to pick up everything in a week.

Dresser Drawers: Take all the drawers out of your dresser and lay them on the bed or the floor. Sort the contents into categories or colors, whichever works for you. Socks, underwear, t-shirts, treasures, shorts, whatever. Dresser drawers are best for things that do not stack or hang well, like socks and underwear, PJs, t-shirts and shorts, etc. Stand back and look at your progress so far, and lay out your clothes for next week.

Week 3: GET RID OF THE CLUTTER AND FIND THE STUFF YOU LOVE.

The next steps are PURGE steps, and they may be difficult at first. And you may wonder why I am telling you to get rid of items when the economy is telling us to hold on to everything.

We are organizing our clothes to get the most out of what we have. There is an 80/20 rule in organizing, a.k.a. the Pareto Principle. This principle states that we use 20% of our stuff 80% of the time. We have favorites, and that is ok. By clearing the clutter, we can find our favorites quicker, better use them and take better care of them.

PURGE! Sorted stuff shows us where we can start to purge. Set these boundaries, too. Let me introduce “t-shirt math”. How often do you do laundry (for example, once a week?). How many t-shirts do you wear in one week (we’ll say 10)? So, technically, you only NEED 10 t-shirts. Perhaps you like variety, and you’ve got some really great t-shirts. So you bump up the number to 20 or 30. That is now your upper limit. And next time the closet gets out of control, refer back to those limits you set.

PURGE! If you have 50 t-shirts, keep your 20 favorite. 20 pairs of white socks, but some are not white any longer, keep 5 or 10. If you have a pile of tattered items you save for “painting”, “working out” or whatever, realize just how often you do these things, and only keep that many.

PURGE! All the clothes that do not currently fit. Jeans, shoes, swimsuits, whatever. Set boundaries now. If you are currently a size 12, decide now to keep one size bigger and smaller, and let the rest go. Don’t let your self expand into those bigger sizes! If you have maternity clothes, set those aside for you or others, but don’t keep them in your closet. If your smaller size clothes are inspiration to lose weight, keep out a few items as visual cues and store the rest in your bins.

PURGE! Realize that clothing can have an expiration date. Keep your treasures from your younger years, but keep them in a bin and not on your closet rod. Refer back to week one, and get rid of the items you would not want people to see. You are a quality person, and you deserve to where well-kept clothing. I have a friend I consider very classy, very current and put together. She is my filter – if I would be embarrassed for her to see me in an item, it goes away.

Two words about socks. “Blue tights”. For some unknown reason, I had 2 pairs of navy blue tights in my drawer the last time I cleaned out my sock drawer. I don’t like tights, and I don’t own anything that would match blue tights. So those went away. Other ways to inspire you to purge socks? Do they pass the Shoe Shopping Test? Would you be embarrassed to take off your shoes in front of anyone right now? If yes, because your socks are too tattered, then it is time to let them go.

Underwear. Do your skivvies pass the Mom Test? Did your mom ever ask you if you “had clean underwear on in case you were hit by a bus, and had to be taken to the hospital?” Keep the good ones, the ones that feel comfortable, and get rid of the rest.

My roommate in college used her under garments as an indicator of when to do laundry. She had lovely things that matched each other, enough for about 3 weeks. So when she got to the bottom of the drawer and things did not match anymore, it was time to do laundry. So do your laundry. Start to finish.

Week 4: FIGURE OUT HOW AND WHERE TO KEEP WHAT’S LEFT

Once you know what you have in your closet and drawers, and you clean out the unusable clutter, it is time to figure out where and how to store what is left over. Think about how you get dressed in the morning.

Decide what you want to see everyday (closet), and what can be put away in drawers. I keep un-stackable items in my dresser, and the rest is hung up in the closet. Anything I need for my day-to-day dressing is hung up where I can see it, so I can put ensembles together easier. Saves me steps and time in the morning.

I use the shelves in my closet for folded sweatshirts, t-shirts and sweaters. I can identify them by just the edge visible in the pile, similar to a book’s binding on a book shelf.

If you are organizing your family members' closets, consider taking an hour on the weekend, picking out outfits for a week and hanging them together in the closet. That may help all of you to be more creative and better use what you have.

If you have a closet like most people I know, you have a hanging rod, and one shelf above it, with 2 or 3 feet of space between the shelf and the ceiling of your closet. Install one more shelf in that space between the rod and the ceiling, and double your visible flat space. I am short, so at first I wanted to organize only the bottom half of the closet just for me. Instead, I bought a \$15 step stool, and can use the whole space!

Use un-conventional storage spaces. We have canvas shoe holders on all of our closet doors, and my sons have hat holders on theirs, too. Under-the-bed storage is great for shoes and bulky off season items.

Maximize your vertical space. Use the space under your clothes for shoe shelves or racks, add that additional shelf above. Mount hooks or chains for your handbags on the walls of your closet, because the more stuff that you can see, the more stuff that you will use.

Week 5: MAINTAIN (Do this process at 2 or 3 times a year!)

The final step to any organizing project is maintenance. And trust me, maintenance is way easier than organizing! It is a matter of looking around once a week or month, and making sure that things are working for you. Perhaps you notice items creeping out of their assigned homes, now is the time to put them back, and figure out if the creeping was due to lack of commitment to returning stuff to it's place, or if the chosen place needs to change.

From now on, shop differently for stuff. If you found multiples of shoes that were no longer comfortable, or t-shirts that shrunk or don't fit your lifestyle anymore, don't buy that kind next time!

[This weeks's Chicago Tribune had great ideas on "swaps" for clothes and home items. Check it out!](#)

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