Tips for efficient spring cleaning

Just when you thought your gloves and scarf were becoming permanently attached to your body, spring has arrived. It's time to banish that bulky coat and boots to the confines of your closet. But without warning, your collection of fishing poles, bridesmaid dresses, pet rocks and tennis rackets has taken your storage space hostage. Grab the clutter monster by the horns and regain control of your space with the help of the tips below:

Clear away distractions. Set aside a few hours or a day, free of other responsibilities. Hire a sitter to take the kids (unless they're old enough to help), turn off the ringer on the phone, map out your plan of action and dive in!

Focus on one space at a time. Give yourself 30 minutes to clean and reorganize a cabinet. Or limit yourself to a few hours to get one room ship-shape. Break the cleaning and reorganizing into smaller tasks so it feels less overwhelming and more manageable.

Categorize. Divide items into bins or bags labelled "keep", "donate", "recycle" and "trash". Put "keep" articles in their proper place and ensure that the rest are hauled off to charity or disposed of within a few days.

Test your devotion. Examine items and ask yourself: Have I touched this in the last year? Do I love it? Do I have more than one? Do I need it? Am I hanging on to it out of guilt? Do I associate fond memories with it or bad ones? Do I know someone who could use it more? Put needed or cherished items, in the keep pile and bid farewell to the rest.

Be realistic. How many times will you actually mourn the loss of that pink polka dot sweater or those strap-on roller skates? Chances are you'll never give them a second thought once they're out of the house.

Hold a garage sale. One person's trash is another person's treasure. So while you're cleaning out that closet or room, put sellable items aside for a sale day. Garage sales can be a fun event for the whole family and you can also invite neighbours or friends to join in. Before you decide on the garage sale option, however, you may want to determine whether you're really prepared to set up shop on the front lawn for a day or two, and if you have the support in place to set up and manage the event. If not, surrender the fantasy and head for your local charity or shelter.

It's easy for clutter to get out of hand, and a spring cleaning can help you take stock and prioritize your home and your life. Staying on top of problem clutter spots throughout the year is one of the simplest ways to avoid it becoming a gigantic, daunting spring clean. From managing junk mail daily, to doing a monthly closet tidy, you can rein in clutter as it arises.