

make over your closet... and your life

You *do* have something to wear—you just can't find it! Use our get-organized tips to regain your wardrobe sanity.

BY HOLLY ST. LIFER

Does throwing open the doors to your closet every morning inspire excitement or dread? “Women don’t realize that your state of mind is often linked to the state of your closet. If it’s a mess, you feel like a mess,” says Melanie Charlton Fascitelli, author of *Shop Your Closet: The Ultimate Guide to Organizing Your Closet With Style*. “But when your clothes are presented in an orderly fashion, you’re instantly more relaxed and confident.” If you’ve been putting off tackling your closet because you don’t know where to start or think it will cost too much, it’s time to kick the task to the top of your to-do list. This step-by-step plan, culled from top organizing pros, will help you clear out clutter with a minimum of anxiety and cash. And who knows, your newly tamed closet just may become your favorite spot in the house.

Ask a friend to help you edit your wardrobe



1 Figure out your budget

You can spend next to nothing or several thousand dollars redoing your clothing corner. Using the ideas on these pages, you can pull off a DIY makeover for less than \$500. But if you think this whole closet-rehab job will just add to your stress, outsource it. Depending on the size you're dealing with, expect to spend any-



where from \$500—using an organizational system like those offered by Elfa—to \$15,000 and up for a custom-designed space.

2 Get out the tape measure

Peter Walsh, the organization guru on the TLC show *Clean Sweep*, believes the key to closet bliss is facing this hard truth: "The amount of clothing you own has to be determined by the space that exists in your closet, period." Start by pulling everything out—make separate stacks for shoes and different types of clothing (pants, suits, formal wear, you name it)—then measure the length, height, and depth of the space you have. (This may be the point at which you say, "Ugh, I don't have time to do all that!" But trust us, better to spend two hours on a rainy weekend than 20 minutes every day rummaging through your clothes.) Take the dimensions with you to purchase shelf dividers, hanging racks, and more (see step three). Walsh estimates

you can fit the following into each 1-foot span: 12 pairs of pants, 15 shirts, or six jackets or suits. This should give you a general idea of how much stuff you'll be able to get back into your closet.

3 Make the most of every inch

The overarching theme when organizing your closet should be "everything in its place." The following tools will help you get there.

✓ A DRESSER OR

HANGING ROD These will help you take advantage of that dead space under shorter garments. Store folded tops and sweaters in a dresser or put short items on a double-hang closet rod from **Organized Living** (\$11; organizedliving.com), which slips over the existing bar—no power drill required.

✓ A HANGING SWEATER BAG

This is another option for folded clothes and usually takes up very little closet space.

An eco-friendly version from the **Container Store** (\$30; containerstore.com), above, is made from recycled materials, has durable bamboo shelving, and holds up to 24 cardigans and crewnecks.

✓ **SHELF DIVIDERS** In most closets, shelf space is at a premium. **Lillian Vernon** dividers (\$12 each; lillianvernon.com) keep towering stacks of clothes in place. The 12-inch-square grids are available in either plated chrome or white vinyl-clad

steel and slide easily onto wood or wire shelves.

✓ **A PURSE CADDY** Give your bags their own home up above with the Park-a-Purse organizer (\$30; lillianvernon.com), which fits standard-depth shelves.

✓ **HOOKS** Hang some on the back of your closet door or on a wall and loop scarves and belts on them.

Our favorite: the romantic **Anthropologie** stencil-flower hook rack, lower left (\$30; anthropologie.com).

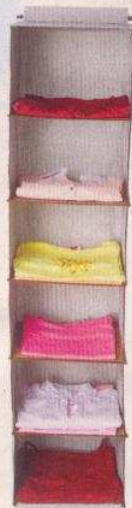
4 Purge, purge, purge

Now turn your attention to those piles on your bed. Sort them into three categories: toss, give away, and keep.

"Anything that's damaged beyond repair or too worn out to donate with a clear conscience should go into the toss pile.

Pieces that are out of style, don't fit (that includes those size 4 jeans you've been holding on to for years), or that you no longer like get thrown into the giveaway stack," says Fascitelli.

"The keep bin is only for clothing that



Hanging shelves only take up a foot of rod space

meets three criteria: You love it, it fits you now, and you've worn it within the last year and know you'll continue to wear it." If you think you'll be indecisive about which pieces should go in which pile, enlist an unsentimental friend to help. Jettison the giveaway items either by donating them to a worthwhile charity (try dressforsuccess.org) or selling them at an online auction site, like ebay.com.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOSHUA MCHUGH; NICOLA GROSELL

A wall-mounted rack can save space



Clear boxes make choosing easy



5 Optimize your shoe storage

Where you decide to house footwear depends on your closet space, but you should be able to quickly put your hands on the pair you want, which means they have to be easily identifiable. We recommend using either a clear 24-pocket over-the-door shoe bag (\$15; spacesavers.com); Shoe Stör clear, stackable shoe boxes, above, which come in three sizes (from \$40 for 10; clear-shoe-boxes.com); or an aluminum stacking shoe rack from the Container Store (\$20; containerstore.com).

6 Turn your closet into a boutique

"It's not just the gorgeous garments that draw us into high-end shops, it's also the presentation," says Fascitelli. "The clothing is arranged neatly and in a way that's visually appealing."

Keep that in mind as you put all your stuff back in the closet. An easy way to make the space inviting is to toss your wire hangers—they lose their shape and leave dents in your clothing—and invest in a matching set. Available in a

variety of fun colors, Joy Mangano Huggable hangers (\$23 for 20; hsn.com) are slim—so you can fit more in your closet—and the velvety finish grips clothes to keep them from slipping off.

Next, group clothing types together: blouses, jackets, dresses, skirts, and pants. If you want to be even more organized, arrange the clothes within each grouping by color. "Once you can see everything, you'll no longer stare blankly into your closet each morning wondering what to wear," says Walsh.

7 Create off-site storage

"To stay clutter-free, only keep clothes in your closet that you're

wearing now," says Joe Lupo, co-author of *Nothing to Wear? A 5-Step Cure for the Common Closet*. Store everything else, like off-season clothing, special-occasion dresses, and maternity wear, somewhere else. If you live in a small apartment, pack a clear Iris underbed storage container (from \$24; stacksandstacks.com) full, then slide it out of sight. Its snap-down buckles will protect your clothing from humidity and dust.

8 Shine a light—in your closet

The SoLux light (from \$60, plus \$16 per bulb; solux.net) simulates natural daylight, so you'll never again leave the house wearing two different shades of black.

9 Adopt a new shopping rule

Once you've determined how many items you can keep in your closet without it getting out of control, be rigorous with new purchases. "When you buy something new, an existing piece has to go," says Walsh. Your other maintenance strategy: Use the change of seasons to review your wardrobe. Get rid of items you didn't end up wearing, as well as clothes for the upcoming season that no longer appeal to you.

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No more wire hangers!



WHAT'S STOPPING YOU FROM LETTING GO?

> Fear of change "Some people keep useless items around because getting rid of them means losing something familiar, and that's uncomfortable," says TLC's Peter Walsh. **Rethink it** Look at the de-cluttering process as weeding out the things that keep you stuck in the past. Editing your wardrobe can create a new and improved version of your current life; it's not a complete change.

> Fear of being out of control "There are women who believe that by owning a lot of items, even if they've never been used, they'll be prepared for every situation," says Walsh. (They're probably overpackers too.) **Rethink it** Clothing doesn't help you stay in control when life throws you a curveball. But your ability to be flexible will see you through.

> Fear of loss "Many of my clients attach memories to things in their closets, like an outfit from their first dream job," says Walsh. "They think if they get rid of it, they'll forget." **Rethink it** Throwing out your first power suit won't diminish that period in your life; you'll still have the memories.

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOSHUA McHUGH; NICOLA GROSELL