

Make Ripples

Clutter Assassin: Living with Less Stuff

by Amanda Bancroft

‘Tis the season of yard sales, and lately, I’ve been having urges to wipe out all clutter in our apartment. It’s almost like an itch I can’t reach: every time I think about moving heavy boxes into an even smaller space in our off-grid earthbag home, I get the urge to sell or freecycle anything I don’t feel attached to. I dive-bomb clutter like a hawk on a mouse.

I’ve been known to get rid of things that are too pink, too large, or too roughly textured. We need to make room in our lives for the solar cooker, canning equipment, garden tools – and can’t afford to keep anything that isn’t a part of the dream we’re building.

In the past year, we’ve recycled about a quarter of our possessions, from books, movies, games, clothes, and furniture. Now I’m moving on to targeting unnecessary kitchen appliances as well as the closet, which is like a fortress protecting the worst of the clutter. I risk my fingers and toes going after clutter serving as brown recluse habitat in the closets, but bravely we clutter assassins must conquer.

Here are a few strategies that have helped me earn my black belt in clutter kicking:

1. **Do I love it enough?** It might be a gift from someone special to me, or maybe it’s my favorite color, but if I don’t get feelings of separation anxiety when I think of putting it on a freecycle table, it might not be worth keeping around.
2. **Is it practical enough?** I used to hang on to things I knew had a clever use if only I could think of what it was. If months have gone by and a practical use hasn’t presented itself, chances are I won’t need to use it, but someone else can.
3. **Space can be eye candy, too.** I study every corner, shelf, and horizontal surface and ask myself "is this pleasing to look at? Does it make me feel relaxed and happy?" If not, clutter can be shifted around or gotten rid of.

Besides just getting rid of clutter, I try to put it to work for me and recycle something laying around into something practical. Recently, I used corn on the cob prongs (the ones shaped like tiny ears of corn) as knobs for hanging small bathroom items. Corny but cute!

We all have strategies we employ to make our home the right place for us. What I strive to do is make my home the place that enables me to have the kind of life I want in the future. Envisioning the type of sustainable, comfortable, and practical home I want is also a great motivation for putting clutter to good use – it’s rewarding to look at a room and think, “Maybe I don’t have my dream house...but this is now one of the rooms in it!”

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling our off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org