

The Spring Cleaning Challenge: Getting Rid of All Kinds of Clutter

By Sally Smith

Although the chill of winter is still upon us, spring is just around the corner. That means that it's time to start contemplating the annual ritual of spring cleaning. Lest you roll your eyes (as I always do) at the thought of spending precious time pawing through the clutter that has accumulated since the new year dawned, I'd like to propose a different approach to freshening up for a new season. Instead of thinking about it as a cumbersome chore, think about spring cleaning as a farmer might: preparing the ground for a season of renewal and growth.

After all, our lives are filled with all types of clutter – physical, emotional, and mental. There's the clutter of negative feelings toward or unfinished business with family members and friends. There's the clutter of the half-read books and the pile of magazines we've been meaning to peruse but have never made the time, or the project list at work that seems to grow rather than shrink. And, of course, there's the clutter that accumulates in the nooks and crannies of our living space.

Getting rid of clutter – regardless of what kind – is ultimately a process of letting go. Although letting go is difficult for most people, for plus-size women it is often complicated by the layers of negative messages we've internalized about our self-worth, the exaggerated expectations we have for ourselves to compensate for our perceived shortcomings, and the wishful thinking that changing the size of our body would magically make our problems disappear.

The approach we take in spring cleaning – or spring renewal – is the same no matter what kind of clutter we're dealing with. So, I'd like to issue a spring cleaning challenge – to myself and to you: to let go of at least some emotional, mental, and physical clutter by cleaning out the bedroom closet and dresser drawers. In the process, we'll be able to connect with other people, help plus-size women in need, and give ourselves a treat.

Why the bedroom closet and dresser drawers? As plus-size women, we likely own clothes in a range of sizes – some that fit and some that don't. Our emotional clutter – either beating ourselves up for gaining weight or fantasizing that someday we'll lose weight and fit into the smaller sizes – often leads to an accumulation of clutter in our closets and drawers. This means that we have no room to fill our minds and hearts with positive, self-affirming thoughts, and that we have no room in our closets for clothing that makes us feel and look our best.

If you're up for the challenge, here's what you can do:

1. Set aside a block of time when you can devote your attention to going through your closet and drawers. If you want, ask a friend to help you with your decluttering and offer to do the same for her.
2. Get a notebook or a journal, so that you can record your thoughts and feelings about the process.
3. Set up three areas in your bedroom: one for clothes to keep; one for worn-out clothes to be thrown away; and one for clothes that you either haven't worn in more than a year; that no longer fit; or that you don't like.
4. Go through each piece of clothing and sort it into one of the three piles. If you're not sure whether something fits, try it on. If feelings come up, write them down in your journal. Acknowledge any negative feelings, and then counteract them with a statement – either a statement that the negativity no longer serves you well and that you're letting it go, or a positive affirmation about your body, your self-worth, or your wardrobe.
5. Once the clothes are sorted, discard the throw-aways and box up the pile that you're not going to keep. Then, hang or fold the clothes that you'll be keeping.
6. Decide what to do with the clothes you're not going to keep. You can organize a clothing swap party with plus-size friends, you can have a garage sale, or you can donate them to charity.
7. Take another look at your wardrobe. These are the clothes that fit and that you'll wear. You can now do an inventory and see where the gaps are. Maybe you need a couple more pairs of pants. Perhaps a spring dress is in order. It could be time to invest in some new bras and panties. Then, peruse MiB's new spring catalog, and treat yourself to some fabulous fashions to supplement your current selection of outfits.

If you decide to take the challenge, I'm sure that the MiB community would love to hear about your experience. Drop us a note and let us know what the process was like for you, what you did with the clothes you no longer needed, and what you bought to supplement your wardrobe. I'll report back on my experience as well. In the meantime, I hope that your spring is filled with a sense of renewal and abundance.