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# What Not to Throw Away When Decluttering Your House

By [Natasha Burton](#), March 16, 2018



Throwing out meaningful items can be counterintuitive to the minimalist movement.

Westend61/Getty Image

The movement to minimize is huge. Tiny houses have become mainstream and, thanks to celebrity-level organizers like Marie Kondo, extreme decluttering is now a way of life. While getting rid of junk is always a good idea, when you pare down your possessions too much, you risk letting go of something valuable.

Here are six things you might not want to throw away when decluttering your house.

RECOMMENDED READING



## 1 PHYSICAL PHOTOS

Our memories are more often immortalized on social media than in leather-bound albums. But don't be too quick to part with your photographs, says Washington D.C.-based professional organizer **Rachel Rosenthal**. "If the photo is all that you have left of the memory, you may want to hang on for safekeeping so that you don't regret it in years to come."

Instead, focus on throwing out duplicates and photos that don't spark emotion (or ones that might stir up negative ones). Then, store your keepers. At the very least, transfer photos to a digital format before tossing.

## 2 FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

Before you put your great uncle's watch in the donation pile, do a little research, says professional organizer **Denise B. Lee**. This way, you won't second-guess yourself later, worried that you may have given away something valuable.

"Ask yourself: Is it unique? Is it in good shape? Is it signed or stamped by the creator?" Lee suggests. If the answer to any of these is "yes," consider checking online auctions or asking a local expert to confirm the item's value. This may help you decide whether to keep it or sell it for its true worth.

Even if the item doesn't have monetary value, anything that's been in family for a long may be worth keeping. Perhaps another family member would enjoy it, or you could creatively display it in your home.

## 3 DUPLICATES OF THINGS THAT MAKE LIFE EASIER

"Someone who is doing extreme downsizing and feels that all duplicates should be eliminated may be sacrificing efficiency for a minimalistic ideal," Lee says. She gives the example of keeping multiple pairs of scissors – in the sewing basket, the desk and the kitchen drawer – which may be more convenient than having one all-purpose (and possibly hard-to-track-down) pair. In some cases, paring down doesn't make life easier.

## 4 ANYTHING DIFFICULT TO REPLACE

Organizing experts advise not letting the price you paid for something keep you from giving it away, since the money is already spent. While this makes sense for parting with clothes that no longer fit or dishes you never use, it doesn't apply to things that are harder or more expensive to replace.

For instance, a past client of Lee's considered giving away a



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pricey car seat and pram that she used with her first child. "She and her husband were on the fence about having another child, so in this case it made sense to keep the expensive baby item," she said. "The possibility of it being used again was pretty good, replacing it was going to cost a lot, and donating it was not going to provide a lot of space."

## 5 ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Paperwork can easily clutter your home, but be careful when tossing certain documents. "While receipts and manuals are OK to discard when no longer needed, you'll never want to get rid of documents that are difficult to replace," Rosenthal says. "These include paperwork related to life insurance, social security, education records, passports, birth certificates and household inventory."

## 6 PERSONAL KEEPSAKES

Only you know what's important to you. Don't be swayed by blogs or books that try to persuade you to, for instance, get rid of all of your children's artwork, if keeping those scribbles is emotionally meaningful to you. "It is perfectly OK to keep some sentimental items – we are sentimental creatures after all," Lee says. If space really is an issue, curate your keepsakes so you're holding onto only your favorites, or take photos of the items to minimize any potential regret.

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