

Organize Your Head & Your Home for the Holidays



Regardless of the actual month we are currently in, it seems the countdown until Christmas* has begun! How does that make you feel? Excited? Overjoyed? Or just stressed-out or anxious? Like you want to pull the covers up over your head and sleep until January?

If so, you can be assured that you are not alone in your reaction. Just go into any store and you will be bombarded with visual reminders that Christmas is right around the corner (and that you're not ready). Then the recording starts in your head..... how can I possibly get ready for Christmas, along with everything else I have to do? Can our family's Christmas ever possibly match the Norman Rockwell or Martha Stewart Christmas standards we've gotten into our heads? What am I going to do this year?

Professional organizers know that any change in your behavior must start with a change in your thinking. If you and your loved ones decide that a frantic, hectic, expensive, unfulfilling, and non-spiritual Christmas is not your cup of tea, you've taken the first step to celebrating a different kind of holiday this year. Just scroll to the next page for tips on those critical next steps to a wonderful holiday season.



* Although this article refers to getting organized for Christmas, the organizing principles are applicable to persons of any religion and even to those who have no religious affiliation. Most of us participate in some type of special celebration at the end of each year. Our goal is to help you focus on the true meaning of whatever occasion you celebrate, and to do so with less anxiety and stress.

Organizing Your Head (Focus)

❖ Define What's Most Important

- How will we spend our time this Christmas season?
- How will we spend our money (budget)?
- What brings us joy or spiritual invigoration?
- What has worked well in the past?
- What are our goals: Faith? Family? Friends? Balance? Calm? Organization? Spiritual Centeredness?
- What have we always wanted to do, but never did?
- And, what's not so important that it's ok to let go or not do it - things that don't bring joy to us or to anyone else?

❖ Schedule Time for What's Most Important

A dream will always be a dream until you schedule time to achieve it. Take the time NOW to get out your calendar and SCHEDULE those important things you want to focus on this Christmas. Remember to include school programs, parties (be selective), concerts, church programs, and service projects, if they are relevant to your life and are important. Don't let the days and weeks fill up with less important activities.

❖ Develop a Plan to Achieve Your Dreams

Once you have decided on your activities to focus on, break each of those tasks down into its component parts. Then actually schedule time on your calendar to do them. It helps to work backwards from the "due date". For example, let's say that you have decided that this will be the year that you'll mail your cards by December 15, so that you'll have time to enjoy your family the last few days before Christmas. Working backwards, schedule when to make the recipient list, when to address the envelopes, etc. Write down each component task, and then cross it off after you have completed it. Don't forget to enjoy the journey!

The second major set of steps is to organize your home for the holidays. See the next page for tips on that important aspect of the holidays!

Organizing Your Home

❖ **Decorating News Flash: Martha Doesn't Live Here! Nor Does Her Staff!**

I have two words for you: BE REALISTIC! The glossy magazines give us all guilt, depression, and unrealistic ideas about what our homes "should" look like in order for our families and friends to have a truly memorable Christmas. Oh, it will be memorable, all right, if you find yourself staying up until 4:00 a.m. spray-painting pinecones and decorating every visible inch of living space by yourself.

Decide what decorations bring you joy without undue stress. Eliminate anything that, because of time, cost, or aggravation, causes you to lose focus.

❖ **The "Honey-Do" List**

One of the many lists we begin to make at this time of year is what one organizer calls the Housing Dissatisfaction List. Husband and wife typically walk around inside and outside their house, legal pad and pen in hand, making a list of all of those things that they simply must do before they could even think about inviting anyone over for Christmas. Again, I repeat those two words: BE REALISTIC!

Yes, your sofa may have a hole in the arm, lovingly dug by your puppy, but your chances of having it reupholstered and back in your home in time for Christmas are slim. A more realistic solution would be to drape a pretty Christmas throw over the arm and schedule the re-upholstery for spring.

After you have completed your list, go back over it and categorize it. Put an "A" next to the items that must be done now (such as repairing the furnace). Put a "B" next to the items that you can realistically do (or pay someone to do) before Christmas. Schedule the A's first, then schedule the B's. Avoid getting into big projects now. They may prevent you from doing the rest of your holiday preparations. Schedule the less-critical items for next spring.

❖ **Avoid the "Ghost of Christmas Perfection"**

Professional Organizer Cynthia Ewer describes this "ghost" as something that tells you that it is possible to organize a completely stress-free, hassle-free, calm, serene, and perfectly beautiful, spiritual holiday season. Well, it is NOT completely possible.

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I once heard a professional organizer say, "perfection is a direction, not a destination". A wise person added that "not only is perfection not a destination, it is not even on the map". Instead of striving for that so-called "perfect Christmas", think about the places you've visited, the people in your life who made you feel special or the things you love. Try to re-create that feeling in your own home. Strive for a welcoming, loving spirit, instead of a perfect home, party, or gift.

Planning and practice give you healthy IMPROVEMENT, not perfection.

Have a Wonderful Holiday!