

Harmonious Home

Three Rooms that Can Make or Break
Your Self-Care Routine



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What is a Harmonious Home?

It's where you go to take off your tight belt, your pinching shoes, your happy face, and your tired psyche. You leave the grime and grit of the outside world behind – including the co-worker who heats up fish and broccoli in the microwave and talks to you through the cubicle walls . . . all day long.

When you walk up to your door and enter, that's it – your sanctuary. Your harmonious home. Everything is just as you like it – the color of the walls, the furnishings and accessories, there's not too much or too little, you can easily find everything you need. Your systems are streamlined and appealing bringing balance and health into your everyday life. You can sit down to relax without seeing unfinished projects everywhere you look. Your home feels comfortable and lived in, but it doesn't feel inhabited - *as in taken over by an outside force (children?)*. Your family, if you have one, is respectful to you and to each other. They contribute equally to bringing harmony to your shared living spaces.

Does this describe your home? If not, it could. My place used to be cluttered, disorganized, and quite frankly embarrassing. I decided years ago that it was important for me to create a sanctuary, so I did. And you can too.

Your home is the starting place for everything that happens in your life. It's the foundation. It's the backbone of a regular healthy eating and fitness routine. It's at the heart of your rest and relaxation. It is your wellness environment – or could be.

One of the most important elements when creating a harmonious home is getting clear on what your vision of your space is. Know your style and what you want to achieve. Do you want to feel expansive and vibrant when you get home? Or would you rather have a calm and quiet retreat? Do you prefer open spaces or complex highly decorated ones? Do you like bright and clear colors or natural and muted? Do you want to welcome many visitors or keep the blinds closed? Do you like everything in sight or everything put away behind closed doors and drawers? Do you want one theme for your décor or do you prefer eclectic?

Another key element is to know what benefits you are trying to achieve when creating or enhancing your harmonious home. Have you thought about how the improvements will benefit you in ways that you actually value? Here's an example. If you continuously leave unfinished projects in clear view to remind you to do them, you may not be aware of the negative impact of this well-meaning habit. It's a fact – I've proved it to myself – unfinished projects are a bummer to look at when you come home tired at the end of the day. They make you feel overwhelmed and maybe even lazy because you have continued to let them slide. Fact is, you're probably not lazy at all. You're just tired and a bit unclear about your home management priorities.

You also must keep in mind what costs you're paying for NOT investing your time and energy in creating a harmonious home. Here's a little exercise that will help you get in touch with the price you are paying for keeping things as they are. Soften your gaze as you walk to the entrance of one of your rooms. Now sharpen your focus and look at the room as if for the first time. Pretend that you're company. Take a mental snap shot. Or get out your camera and take a real photo.

With this clear focus you'll see all the little things about the room that rob your peace of mind. You'll see the ugly painting over the fireplace that you never really liked. You'll see the stack of unread books leaning precariously on the coffee table. You'll see piles of clothes or mail or newspapers. And of course there are the unpacked boxes from your move four years ago. There may even be some dirty dishes mixed in just to make you feel really cruddy. And there's almost always a gift that you dislike but display so you don't hurt somebody's feelings. Or worse, there are relics from past relationships that continually remind you of your big and little failures. That's bad Feng Shui not harmonious home!

If you're shocked by what you see when you look at your home with fresh eyes, don't be. It's really easy to get so comfortable in our surroundings that we stop seeing them. Maybe it's time to switch things up and create a cleaner, neater, more harmonious home.

This isn't a course in miracle working. You have to clear the decks and make time. Just like any transformation, a harmonious home takes forethought and a bit of planning. Invite a friend to help you revision your place. Set aside time either in big blocks or a few minutes every day to start chipping away at the things that don't belong in your sanctuary.

The harmonious home already lives in your space – you just have to carve away everything that isn't harmonious. You may need just a small chisel, or you may need a jack hammer. Either way, just start. What's one thing you could do right now to make your home more harmonious? Do it now!

Harmonious Home

The 30-Day Approach

Pre-program Steps

- Clear the decks for the project
- Start thinking about what you'd like to accomplish in 30 days
- Gear up and get excited
- Take the pop quiz: Do you have a harmonious home? (Page 9)

Two Possible Approaches

1. If your home feels flat or ho hum--

If your home is pretty organized but it just feels blah – your 30-day goal can be to create your own personalized eco system that feels like a sanctuary – fluff it up, bring in color, change it up with a new style of décor, bring nature inside, etc.

2. If your home feels chaotic - more like a junk yard or city dump than a sanctuary--

If your home is cluttered or disorganized, your 30-day goal can be to streamline everything – declutter, simplify, organize, and handle unfinished projects and tasks. You might focus on setting up perfect systems to simplify your daily or weekly tasks.

Harmonious Home Goal Menu

For 30 days, you can work on any goals—stick to just one room or work in all three. Your goals can be based around things you really want to do, something you really don't want to do but need to do, or working your way through a long list of to-dos that you are going to finally take care of (do, dump, or delegate). Here are a few sub goals to keep in mind as you plan your approach to your 30-day project.

- Set up a healthy eating environment (Kitchen).
- Paint the inside of your house (or part of it).
- Bring color into your home through accessories, furniture, plants and flowers.
- Personalize and perfect your home decoration.
- Clean out the closets and organize them (one room or several).
- Go through boxes (we all have boxes of stuff) and take action (label, discard, recycle, give away, start using, sell, etc. Your theme might be "No longer boxed in."
- Decide how to handle inherited furniture and household belongings from parents or children using your place for off-site storage.
- Get ready for an auction, garage sale, etc.
- Create a harmonious system of family chores – who does what when, rewards/reminders, how to make it fun, how to involve the entire family in the planning.
- Hang pictures you've been meaning to hang.
- Design family living plan: chores, weekly/monthly family meetings, play days, vacations, how discipline is handled, how rewards are handled, etc.
- Accessorize your home in fun, satisfying ways.
- Create a theme for your life and find ways to carry it throughout your living spaces.
- Get rid of anything that brings your mood down (ugly gifts, objects that are painful reminders, broken or worn out things, etc.).
- Fix wherever you're out of integrity with what you say you want and what your environment supports. Healthy eating goal >>> healthy kitchen environment. Good sleep >>> restful bedroom

How to Succeed in a Big Way

Sometimes we get excited and start projects, but then we don't follow through. It happens to all of us. After all, we're all busy and have lots of choice for how to spend our time.

Here are several things we all need to do to be wildly successful:

1. Clear your schedule so that you can devote serious time to this project.
2. Plan your work days (hours) and schedule them into your calendar. Set up reminders – notes on the refrigerator, in your planner, by your phone, on your calendar, etc. so you won't forget your project.
3. Ask for help when you need it.
4. Stick with your goal to create a harmonious home. Don't chicken out and talk yourself out of working hard towards your goal. Yes it will take work! But the payoff will be fabulous as you'll soon see. You're going to love it. So work through any resistance . . . you'll be glad you did.
5. Be kind and gentle with yourself when you're succeeding and when you're not working up to your personal expectations.
6. Feel gratitude every day for the home and the life you DO have. Approaching this project with respect and loving kindness will give you the energy and peace of mind to keep going to completion. Also be patient.

Pop Quiz

Do You Have a Harmonious Home?

Taking this little quiz will help you see how harmonious your home is. Although you will be working in just three rooms for now, you can always return to this little quiz and take more steps toward having a harmonious home.

1. Are your wellness goals in alignment with your home environment? Is your home environment set up to help you live a wellness lifestyle?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
2. Is your kitchen the hub of your home? Is it stocked with health enhancing foods? Are the counter tops cleaned off and ready for action? Is your kitchen inviting? Do you love cooking in your kitchen?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
3. If you have a family, are your goals for your family in alignment with what actually takes place within your home environment? Do the inhabits contribute equally, considering their age and ability, to making the household function smoothly?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
4. Is your bedroom set up to support deep, relaxing sleep and sensuous pleasure as opposed to supporting stress from piles of laundry, the computer, exercise equipment, and a television keeping you up late?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
5. Is your bedtime and morning routine set up to support you in getting ready for the day and in winding down pleasurably at the end of the day? Do your morning and evening routines help reduce the stress of getting out the door to work and back in the door to a peaceful evening?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help! What routine?
6. When you walk up the sidewalk and open the door to your home, what are your first thoughts:
 - Perfect! I'm home. I love this place. _____
 - My home look so great, I'd like to have some company. _____
 - I'm so close to loving this place. What's missing? _____
 - This place is such a mess, I have SO much to do. _____
 - I just can't face it ... I'm going to watch the tube. _____
 - I need a month off! _____
 - Where do I start! Where's the flood when you need it? _____
 - This place looks boring, uninspiring. _____
 - I'd rather stay in a nice hotel. _____

7. Is your home cluttered with stuff: stacks of papers, books, magazines, or newspapers? Are their clothes, shoes, and toys everywhere? Are their unpacked boxes?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
8. Are their unfinished projects staring you in the face all the time?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
9. Are the wall colors and accessories appealing and comforting to you?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!
10. Is your yard, patio, deck tidy and appealing to you?
_____ Yes _____ No _____ Help!

Scoring

Basically there is no scoring. You've been evaluated long enough. Right? Just use this little quiz to help you pinpoint ways you can create more harmony in your home. You may have a lot to do or just a little. The good news is that you can have what you want. You just need to want it badly enough to roll up your sleeves and do the work to get it. Enlist some help and find ways to make it fun.

What initial thoughts do you have about working your way through this program? Write them in the space below.

Initial Thoughts

Make a Plan

Secrets of Making an Awesome Plan

- Do a walk-through assessment to determine possible goals for each of the three rooms: bedroom, kitchen, bathroom.
- To get you started, select one goal to work on.
- Have a vision for what you want to achieve. Selecting just one thing will inspire you, focus your efforts, make it clear what needs to be done, have a pay off when it's completed, and feel do-able within 30 days. **Answer the question: Why do I care about this goal?**

- Give your vision *feet* by giving it a project title (which becomes your rallying cry or your mantra when things get tough).
- List the action steps for this project (use the Action Steps planning sheet).
- Determine your strategy – when will you work and for how long, will you have help, what rewards will you give yourself for reaching your milestones and your final goal, etc.).
- Schedule the small and the large tasks.

Getting Started

1. What is your overall goal – simply stated?

2. What is your vision/project title?

3. Have you determined your strategy for achieving your goal and working through the action steps?

____ yes ____ no ____ started it

Have you cleared the decks to work on this project this week?

____ yes ____ no ____ started it

4. What obstacles, if any, do you think you will encounter and what will you do to minimize these obstacles?

5. What help or support would you like?

6. What rewards will you give yourself throughout this program? Rewards can be big or small: take a hot bath with no interruptions under penalty of death, take time to do whatever you want for a day (or half day)-- maybe read a book, go into the city and play, sleep in and wear your PJs all day. Or buy a DVD/CD, get new underwear, have morning coffee with a friend, get a pedicure, manicure, facial, or massage, etc. Don't skip this step!

Select Your 30-Day Rewards

Week 1 reward _____

Week 2 reward _____

Week 3 reward _____

Final Reward _____

Action Steps to Reach Your Goal

Never mistake motion for action – Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)

Harmonious Home Goal: _____

Project title: _____

Date Scheduled To Do . . .	Completed	Action/Task Schedule the action steps below into your planning system. Place a checkmark next to each item as action step as you've completed it.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	6.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	7.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	8.
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	<input type="checkbox"/>	21.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	22.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	23.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	24.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	25.

Take Action

Secrets of Taking Action and Eliminating Dread

- Determine what the very first action is.
- Clear the decks for the day's tasks.
- Use a timer.
- Get help – work with a friend.
- Prioritize – by what's most interesting to you, by what needs the most help, by what's easiest to do.
- Easy does it – importance of checking in with self—to enjoy the process.

Stick With It

Secrets of Sticking with It . . . Even When You Want to Chicken Out

- Continue using the strategies that worked well last week—what were they (using a timer, working with a buddy, clearing the decks, checking in with yourself to be sure you're being gentle with yourself and enjoying the process, etc.).
- Congratulate yourself on everything you've done on this project – even if you think it's just small things.
- Resistance to change has a way of stalling out a project. Don't let this happen to you. Remind yourself of your vision and why you want it. And don't let anybody's comments about your project or negative body language bum you out!
- Recognize obstacles - If you aren't accomplishing as much as you'd like to, get clear on what the obstacles are (time, energy, mood, negative self-talk, lack of focus, lack of inspiration, feeling overwhelmed). How can you reduce or eliminate the obstacle? Email the group and let us know what's going on with you. We'll spring into action with a pat on the back, helpful ideas and inspiration.
- Remind yourself why you're doing this – anticipate and enjoy the benefits – the final outcome.

Finish What You Start

Secrets of Finishing What You Start . . . Even When You Want to Stop

- Do you have a habit of starting projects but never finishing them? This is very common. Remind yourself that it feels bad to not finish. And it feels great to finish. So go the extra mile and finish.
- Acknowledge what you have already accomplished. Focus on your accomplishments, not on what is left to do.

Harmonious Home

The 30-Day Approach

One-Page Project Plan

What do you need to do to clear the decks so you have time, space and energy for this project? Get them done, if possible, before you start this projects.

Week 1 - Make an Awesome Plan

- ☐ Do a walk-through assessment.
- ☐ Have a vision for what you want to achieve.
- ☐ Give your vision feet by giving it a project title.
- ☐ List all of the action steps.
- ☐ Determine your strategy – times to work, support, rewards, etc.
- ☐ Schedule the small and the large tasks.

Week 2 - Take Action Each Day

- ☐ Clear the decks for the day's tasks.
- ☐ Determine what the first action needs to be and do it.
- ☐ Select your get-off-the-dime strategies: timer, friend, reward.
- ☐ Determine the day's priority tasks.
- ☐ Easy does it – check in with yourself, be gentle, and enjoy the process.

Week 3 - Stick With It

- ☐ Congratulate and reward yourself every week (decide ahead).
- ☐ Recognize any obstacles. Decide how you can reduce or eliminate each one.
- ☐ Remind yourself why you're doing this; anticipate and enjoy the final outcome.

Week 4 - Finish What You've Started

- ☐ Set up additional work times and get 'er done.
- ☐ Visualize yourself accomplishing your project goals. See it!

Harmonious Home: Your Bedroom

Alexandra Stoddard is one of my favorite authors. She can inspire just about anyone to live a beautiful life. Here's a poignant description of the importance of our bedrooms:

Bedrooms are the most revealing of our personalities. Here we lie down and shut our eyes, lower our defenses, and open ourselves to dreams, fantasies, and love. The intimacy of this room makes it a space that is highly charged emotionally. When we love, we go to bed. When we sleep, we are in bed. When we are sick, whether in mind, body, or spirit, we take to the bed. We are restored by bed rest.

Our bedroom is where we experience ecstasy, or great sadness. It is the room where we very often receive fateful telephone calls, bearing the bad as well as the good news. It is where the joys of life and its sorrows are deeply lived and felt. Think about the reality of your own life and what this room has meant to you.

Alexandra Stoddard, Creating a Beautiful Home

Most of us know this to be true of our bedrooms, yet we live as if the bedroom were just a room like any other – one to dump our lives into without much thought. I've done this myself when life has gotten busy and demanding. Her passage is a reminder to pay more attention and tune in to what the bedroom really means to each of us.

Which type of Bedroom do you have?

- Is your bedroom bulging at the seams with shoes piled up in the closet, clothes on the floor or on chairs because there's no more room in the closet? Do you have a stack of books on your bedside table along with a lot of other things?

- Do you have to shove a pile of stuff off your bed before there's room for you? Is it scary under your bed?
- Are you somebody who LIVES in your bedroom? Is it a place where you eat, exercise, watch TV, and work on your computer?
- Or do you just have an ordinary messy bedroom because you're usually in a hurry dashing in and out, dropping clothes and stuff on the floor and bed as you rush off to work, to a party, or to get dinner ready?

Regardless of whether your bedroom is a total disaster or if it just needs tweaking, you'll follow the same four steps.

Step 1: Start by taking EVERYTHING out of the bedroom that doesn't belong there

For many of you, this step alone will get you half way to an organized room.

If you have many things in your bedroom that are out of place and need to go to other places, you might get sidetracked if you take them there now. You decide.

Solution: Have a laundry basket, box or bin to put everything in that is out of place. Fill it up and set it aside to empty as soon as you've finished the other steps.

If you're decluttering several rooms and like the idea of using several sorting boxes, consider these labels: trash, return (to correct place or rightful owner), sell/give away, store.

Label the boxes in any way that will help you sort easily.

Do you have a TV in the room? Does it belong in there?

Watching TV in bed sounds tantalizing. I know that many kids today have computers and TVs in their rooms. On the surface I'd love to have a TV in my bedroom. But as I think about it, I know that the bedroom is one place where I unplug, take a deep breath, and download the stress and experiences of the day. I let everything go. If I were to watch TV or surf the net instead, I'd miss this "letting go" opportunity--day after day.

TV is compelling – it takes a really disciplined person to watch just enough to make the TV a 100% positive experience. My friend Brenda can do this. But most of us overdo it. We watch mindlessly instead of doing something that might take a little more thought or energy to get us going in a more creative direction.

What role does TV play in your life? Do you have one in your bedroom? Is it working for you? Listen to your gut. Does a TV belong in your bedroom? If you have one in your room now, I can imagine it would be a hard thing to give up. Maybe these questions will help you think through this interesting question.

- Has watching TV in your bedroom ever kept you from doing something else?
- Has it ever kept you up too late?
- Has it kept you from tuning in to your partner?
- Has it kept you from going to sleep?
- Has it kept you from processing your day so you could sleep peacefully?

Step 2: Scan your room to see if you have too much stuff and need to get rid of some the excess

Below, check the items you have too many of:

- _____ Too many clothes - in general
- _____ Too many shoes
- _____ Too many pants/slacks
- _____ Too many skirts/dresses
- _____ Too much jewelry
- _____ Too many shorts

- _____ Too many socks
- _____ Too many t-shirts
- _____ Too many blouses/shirts
- _____ Too much underwear
- _____ Too many nick knacks
- _____ Too many sheet sets
- _____ Too many blankets or comforters
- _____ Too much stuff on the bedside table (magazines, books, notes, glasses, food, reading glasses, etc)

Tips to Help You Let Go of Excess Stuff

- If you have difficulty getting rid of clothes, here's a handy tip to let you know what clothes you are actually wearing and which ones you aren't. Turn all of the hangers around so that the point of the hook faces you, instead of facing away. When you wear something, hang the hanger up as usual with the tip of hook facing away from you. At the end of the season, consider letting go of anything you haven't worn - which will be obvious by how many things are on hangers with the hook tips still facing you. This is a cool visual reminder. You may be surprised how many clothes you haven't worn.
- If you have difficulty getting rid of things, have a friend join you. Just their presence will help you see that the worn down heels on your shoes are not appealing, and you'll put them in the give-away pile. When you hold up an old piece of clothing that you never wear, it will LOOK unattractive when your friend is sitting there with you.

Also ask yourself, if you would wear that item on a date, to a special event, or out to dinner. If the answer is *no*, hand it to your friend to put in the give-away pile. Your friend may do nothing more than just sit on your bed and fold things to give away. Your friend becomes a presence, just holding space for letting go. It's amazing how well this method works. I've done this more than once with a friend. You can do it for each other too.

- If your closets are packed and it is unpleasant to hang things up, set a percentage goal of how much you'd like to clean out - 25 - 50% is not unreasonable if you haven't purged in a while. With a little breathing space in your closet, you'll be more inclined to hang things up and to wear things that you didn't remember you had because they were smashed between clothes you never wear.
- Getting rid of shoes can be a challenge. If somebody were to make guesses about you based on your shoes, what would they guess? Are the heels worn down? Are the shoes scuffed and dirty? Are they full of cobwebs and dead flies? Would these shoes make your outfit look great and be a nice accessory, or would you be better off going barefoot? Do the shoes hurt your feet? If they do, chuck them! Maybe they won't hurt somebody else's feet. Do you have so many shoes that you NEVER wear some of them? Get rid of them and give the shoes you love some breathing space.

What do clothes and shoes represent to you? Do they mean more to you than you think they should? If yes, have you ever explored what they mean to you and why? Maybe my story will help.

When I was young, I was the youngest of 3. We didn't have much money so my clothes and shoes were usually hand-me-downs from my sister. She got them new. I got them used. I often felt like an ugly duckling – tall and skinny with my knee highs falling down around my ankles – unless I wore rubber bands around the tops. Talk about a confidence buster.

I remember once getting a beautiful, new pair of shoes. I was in love with them. I slept with them on the floor by the head of the bed so that when I awoke in the night, I could raise my head and look at them adoringly. I believe this childhood experience of scarcity created a tendency in me to buy too many clothes and shoes. Recognizing the core issue helped me process it and heal it. I still love clothes and shoes, but my style now is to buy a few high quality items that I love.

Step 3: Clean off all horizontal surfaces (floor, bed, chairs, bedside table)

The more you DO in your bedroom (e.g., exercise, read, work on your computer), the more difficult it may be to declutter it because each activity has its own “toys.” But it will be worth jumping into this process with both feet to see what progress you can make. Just start with one surface. Then move to the next.

Everything in a bedroom should contribute to an atmosphere of peace. Billy Baldwin

- Hang up any clothes on the floor. If your closet has open, inviting places, you'll be more likely to hang your clothes up rather than drop them on the floor. Right? Get in the habit of hanging things up. It only takes a few seconds and it dramatically simplifies cleanup.
- Put dirty clothes in the hamper. Do you have a hamper or laundry basket in your closet? That would really help you keep things picked up. I have one laundry basket for colored clothes and one for whites. I toss the clothes in the right basket right away so I never have to sort clothes before washing them. Yes, it's great.
- Look at your bedside table (if you have one), and see if you actually USE everything that's on it. Bedside tables tend to get stacked with all kinds of things—books and magazines, plates and cups, snack foods, nose drops, antacids, reading glasses, earrings, change, etc. Clear away any items that you don't need to have on that table. Put them away or put them where you actually DO use them.
- Put shoes away until you need to wear them. I have too many shoes because I love shoes. There isn't enough room in my closet to put them away, so I bought a plastic tub that fits nicely under my bed. I put all of the shoes in it that I wear regularly. Every night I pull the tub out and put away the shoes I wore that day and select shoes I will wear the next day. I love that simple system.

Step 4: Create Systems and Routines That Suit Your Life and Your Lifestyle

My Evening Routine

Here's an example of a system and routine that works for me. I'm a night owl and I hate to get up. That's why it's been a lifesaver for me to select everything I'm going to wear the night before - everything. I put my underwear, socks and earrings on my dresser, my shoes go by the bed under the dresser, and I hang the clothes I'm going to wear on a fancy hook on the outside of the closet door as if I had a handmaid.

I pack my briefcase and lunch the night before too! I can be out the door in minutes if I have to. Sure the weather may throw me a curve, but it usually doesn't. And I can easily grab a slightly warmer or cooler jacket to wear.

Questions to Ponder

Morning and Evening Routines

1. Do you stay up too late? What enticing evening routine would encourage you to go to bed earlier?
2. Are you rushed to get out the door in the morning? What zippety routine would help streamline this process—this may depend on whether you're a night or morning person.
3. Do you have trouble sleeping? What adjustments to your behaviors and environment would improve the quality of your sleep?

Setting the Bedroom Scene

1. Do you have too many clothes and shoes? What kind of support and resources (information, tools, etc.) would help you pare down?
2. Is your bedroom relaxing, peaceful, intimate? What changes would make your bedroom a personal sanctuary?
3. Do you have compassion for who you are...and the way you are? What would help you have more?

Bonus Tip

I read an article by Dr. Andrew Weil about the potential dangers of sleeping close to the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) of electric clocks, so I got rid of mine and now use a small, handy travel clock.

Benefits of a bedside travel clock vs. an electric clock

- I NEVER over sleep if the electricity goes out, which it does now and then.
- It's also very small so it doesn't take up much room on my tiny nightstand. I love that.
- I've never had to replace the watch battery, and I've had it for several years.
- And I don't risk messing up my brain or other body parts with EMFs. Also for this same reason, I never use electric blankets, electric waterbed heaters, etc.
- I can take my travel clock with me when I travel, and I know how to set it! And I know that it is reliable because I use it every day.
- Because it uses zero electricity, it's cheaper for me and for the environment. The battery lasts for years!

Benefits of a Decluttered Bedroom

- It will feel great to be able to see what you have in your closet.
- You won't have to struggle and strain to hang things up or put things away in your closet. There will be blessed ROOM!
- You will find clothes you forgot you had. It will be like getting new clothes.
- You may be able to sleep better. Good feng shui, ya know.
- More time and less stress are two big benefits. Remember, the less you have to take care of (dust, polish, wash, sort, store, step over, root through), the more time and less stress you will have in life.

Open spaces bring peace. Clear out some old, unused stuff and create space for you and your favorite stuff to breathe. And don't be too hard on yourself as you're working through this process. Being self-critical will slow you down. Being excited about making a change will spur you on!

Harmonious Home: Kitchen

The kitchen is the hub of most homes. When it's working, everything else works better--better nutrition, less weight gain from eating out all the time, easier on the budget, increased likelihood the family will hang out and eat together, and a satisfied feeling that things are well in the world.

The distance is nothing; it's only the first step that is difficult. Marquise du Deffand

So let's get started. Let's take the first step toward streamlining your kitchen.

Key Points about Clutter in the Kitchen

You simply can't keep a clean, highly functioning kitchen if it's cluttered.

- A cluttered kitchen kills the desire to cook, so you eat out more.
- It's hard to get kids (and others) to help set the table or unload the dishwasher when the kitchen is cluttered and disorganized.
- A cluttered kitchen makes you feel like a poor life manager.
- Your nutrition and that of your family suffer if your kitchen is so cluttered that it's difficult or unappealing to use.
- You can't organize clutter, unless you want to keep doing it every day when the excess spills over again, and again. So you must FIRST get rid of the clutter, then you can get organized.

You can do much to simplify and streamline your kitchen by following these four action steps:

Step 1: Assess Your Kitchen Tools and Appliances

Do you love them and use them all? Open your drawers and cabinets. Look through the tool caddy on your counter. Pick up each and every hand tool, electric tool, and gadget in your kitchen and ask these questions to help you pare down to the essentials:

- Is this easy to use?
- Do I frequently use it?
- Is it enjoyable to use - e.g., It feels good in my hand.
- Is it easy to clean?
- Is it easy to store and does it earn its keep in storage space?
- Do I have too many of these?
- Can I do this task just as easily by hand (without the messy cleanup of a machine?)
- Does this tool really make the task easier and quicker, or is it just a cool gadget?
- Is it uncomplicated to use, clean and care for?
- Is it clean, in good shape, and ready for action?

Step 2: Eliminate the Excess and Don't Buy More

Think twice before buying new gadgets. There truly is a tool for every task. So we're tempted to buy lots of tools. Make a pact with yourself that you will avoid impulse buying of kitchen gadgets. On the shelves of the store, gadgets look cute, cool, and useful. The promise that "they will do the cooking for you" is appealing. Instead of speeding up your cooking process, though, they often clog up our drawers, counters, and cabinets.

To tell the truth, it's easier not to bring a tool home than it is to give it up once it's held a place in our drawers.

Don't talk yourself into keeping clutter. If some of your tools don't pass the love-it-use-it test in item #1, then they're clutter and it's time to move them out of your kitchen. Don't fight to keep your clutter with these kinds of statements:

- I may need it someday.
- I have space for it.
- It was expensive.
- It's still good.
- I like the way it looks.
- I inherited the clutter gene and I can't help myself.
- It was a gift.
- It was a souvenir.
- It doesn't take up much room.
- If I start entertaining again, I'll need it.

Step 3: Decide Where You Will Unload the Excess

Making this decision ahead of time may help you loosen your grip on your stuff. Here are some possibilities:

- www.freecycle.org (join one of the thousands of local online groups that get-and-give items for free to help keep them out of the landfills).
- Thrift stores
- Church kitchens
- Local shelters
- Garage sales
- Friends and family members

Step 4: Organize the Four Major Kitchen Work Centers

Setting up the work centers is the fun part of streamlining your kitchen. After the clutter is gone, the rest is like putting together a fun puzzle.

Guiding Principles to Help You Set Up Your Work Centers

1. **Store things where they are first used.** This is an obvious time saver, but we don't always do it.
2. **Provide one-motion storage** for frequently used items – reach and get. Provide two-motion storage for less frequently used items. Two motion means you need to move something and then reach for the item.
3. **Keep working surfaces free of clutter** and excess decorations. What's taking up your valuable counter space? Seldom used appliances? Canisters you don't use, back packs, mail?
4. **Store things one deep** for easy access. Moving things out of the way is frustrating and time consuming.
5. **Use shelf stackers and risers** to utilize more space and to easily and inexpensively customize your cabinets.
6. **Group and contain.** Rectangular containers take up the least amount of space.
7. **Make a place for everything and put everything in its place.** This step will make your kitchen efficient and neat and everything is easy to find.

Work Center #1: Prep Center

What do you do there?

- Cut vegetables
- Prepare meats
- Mix baked goods

Biggest Problems or Challenges

- Messy counters (dirty dishes, etc.)
- Tiny cutting board, or no cutting board at all
- Dull knives or the wrong kinds of knives
- Unnecessarily limited counter space - too many items stored or displayed on the counter
- Poor access to the tools you need most frequently

To Improve Efficiency

No matter what kinds of food you cook or prepare, the most important key to success in the prep center is to keep the counters free of clutter. An empty counter is inviting.

Once you determine what you do most frequently in the prep center, you can more easily determine what tools you will need to have really handy. Here are several examples of ways to improve efficiency in the prep center:

If you make a lot of stir fries you'll need a sharp knife or two, a large cutting board, possibly a food processor, and spices. You will also need plenty of counter space for the produce, so keep the counter free and clear.

If you cook meat, consider using a designated cutting board just for meat that you clean thoroughly after each use. I use a specialized plastic sheet that I can put in my dishwasher to sterilize it. You can

find these “cutting boards” in the kitchen section of a department store. They may be packaged flat or rolled up.

If you make smoothies regularly, you’ll need a blender, cutting board, plastic spatula, a knife to cut fruit, and plenty of counter space. Consider designating one cutting board just for preserving delicate fruit flavors (e.g., don’t cut strawberries on the cutting board used for chopping garlic).

If you bake a lot, you will improve your efficiency if you have mixing bowls, a mixer, a flour shifter, measuring cups and spoons, a plastic spatula, and baking ingredients like flour, sugar, spices, baking soda stored near the prep center.

Work Center #2: Sink Center

What do you do there?

- Wash and peel vegetables
- Wash dishes
- Get water for cooking

Biggest Problems or Challenges

- Congested counter space that is cluttered with dirty dishes and pots and pans.
- Everything left out in sight (dish drainer, dish soap, scrubbies).
- Sink unappealing or inefficient - too small or not divided for washing and rinsing. You want your sink to look clean and invite washing.

To Improve Efficiency

- Consider keeping the sink area clear of everything nonessential. Put away the dish drainer and scrubbers, and detergents.

- If possible, set up a nearby cabinet to put away dishes, glasses, and bowls as soon as they're clean.
- Always empty the dishwasher right away so it's ready for more dirty dishes. This habit will help keep the counters free of dirty dishes and ready for action.
- If your sink is not divided, create a "division" by using a plastic tub for washing or rinsing.
- Have these tools handy: a vegetable scrubber, peeler, colander, and a salad spinner (a must--if you eat a salads and greens)

Work Center #3: Cooking Center

Biggest Problems or Challenges

- Too many pots and pans and they're often hard to access – heavy, stacked, and stored low so it's hard to easily grab the one you want

What do you do there?

- Stir foods on the stove
- Season food
- Bake and roast

To Improve Efficiency

- Have these tools nearby: variety of stirring spoons, spoon rest, meat thermometer, toothpicks to test for doneness, potholders, aluminum foil.
- Have these food items handy: cooking oil spices to correct flavor (e.g., salt, pepper, hot peppers, soy sauce, and vinegar).
- If your sink is not near your cooking center, have a small water pitcher nearby to easily add water to soups, stir fries, sautéed vegetables.
- Hanging pots above your head is bad Feng Shui – I guess we have a sense that these heavy items could fall and crack us on the head. I

wouldn't like the look of my everyday pots hanging up on display anyway, so I've never been attracted to the hanging method . . . until it occurred to me to place two rows of hooks on my kitchen back door. The top row is for frequently used sauce pans. The bottom row is for various sizes of skillets. This is a perfect solution to my pot storage problem! I continue to admire myself for dreaming up this wonderful storage solution. Because the door is out of the way, my pots are easily accessible when I want them, but they are not on display.

Work Center #4: Refrigerator Center

Biggest Problems or Challenges

- Over stuffed or empty
- Not regularly assessed and cleaned out
- No designated place for everything
- Wasted food.

What do you do there?

- Store and retrieve food
- Make note on a magnet pad of foods you need at the store
- Enjoy pictures of your family, grand kids, quotes, and other refrigerator art

To Improve Efficiency

- Can you see to the back of the fridge or freezer? If you can't, there's an increased likelihood that foods will go to waste because you'll miss seeing them. Set a goal of having open spaces in your refrigerator.
- Don't over-buy fruits and vegetables when you shop. Yes, they look great in the store, but then you can't possibly eat them all before they compost in the fridge. The large plastic bags also block the view to see items you want to eat while they're still fresh.

- Create a weekly or monthly menu. This step will help you buy efficiently and effectively so you don't buy food and then don't use it.
- Containerize just like you do in your cabinets and drawers. A wide assortment of containers is available at organizing stores like Organized Living, department stores, discount stores, and even grocery stores. Organizing tools will help you organize the refrigerator zones for ease and efficiency.
- Determine what goes in each refrigerator zone (e.g., dairy, leftovers, vegetables, meat)
- Use containers you can see through (glass).
- Group items you frequently use (e.g., sandwich fixings and condiments). Pull out the whole tray when you're ready to make sandwiches.
- Get rid of condiments you don't use or ones past the *use-by* date
- The freezer becomes almost unusable when it's packed full. Invariably someone brings ice cream to your potluck and there's no place to put it in the freezer. Set a goal to keep the freezer only half to three-fourths full and turn food items over quickly. Translated that means, eat the food or throw it out. A guiding rule: if weren't crazy about food when it fresh, don't freeze it because you'll like it even less thawed out.
- Label the contents of everything in the freezer and keep a list (inventory) of freezer contents (by category) on the front or side of the fridge. Check the items off as you use them.

You Don't Have to Live with a Cluttered, Inefficient Kitchen

Wouldn't you love to have a less stressful morning and evening routine in a kitchen that is neat and organized? Decluttering your kitchen will make a big difference. Let this quote inspire you:

When half the stuff in your cabinet is stuff you don't use, it isn't just innocently lying there--it is stealing 50 percent of your usable space The one-third bad really hurts the two-thirds good. Just as a small haze can ruin the sharpness of a great picture, too much junk and clutter sprinkled in (like over salting) can ruin the taste and appeal of the good stuff.

Don Aslett, Not For Packrats Only

If you're someone who wants to spend as little time as possible in the kitchen, you'll want to make sure it's decluttered and organized. Here are the key benefits of having a streamlined, decluttered kitchen:

- Spend less time preparing, cooking, and cleaning up
- Get help from the family for meal preparation and cleanup
- Improve health by cooking and eating at home
- Make it easier to entertain
- Stop wasting money on duplicate purchases and wasted food
- Reduce breakage of items
- Reduce frustration and self-criticism

It's even possible that you'll want to spend more time in the kitchen. You may even begin to enjoy cooking.

Bonus: Quick Tweaks to Beautify Your Kitchen

1. Put a sprig of a fresh herb (or a flower) in a simple bud vase where you will see it often, maybe at the kitchen window.
2. Group extra platters, vases, silk flowers, mementos (photos, certificates, vintage things) for an interesting display on top of your cabinets.
3. Place one piece of fruit for every day of the week in a beautiful bowl on the counter or island to remind you to eat it.
4. Enjoy the beauty of fresh vegetables you plan to eat in the next day or two by displaying them on the counter on an attractive planter.

Harmonious Home: Bathroom

Families often fight over bathroom time . . . especially if they have teenage girls. When you finally get a chance to get in there to get ready for work or bed, you may not have as much time as you'd like. Solution? Make sure the bathroom is streamlined for quick morning and evening routines.

What Shape is Your Bathroom in?

If you had unexpected company right now, would you be embarrassed if they asked to use your bathroom? If you had a date, would you be able to get ready lickity split because your bathroom is really organized? Or, if you wanted some quiet bathroom time with a hot bath, a book, and a candle, would you have an attractive spa-like experience? Or would you think "icky pooh."

Do You Have Any of These Major Bathroom Problems?

1. **Too much stuff.** How many bottles of shampoo and creme rinse do you really need (and use)? And how many different kinds of lotion, tooth paste, and lipstick do you have? Do you use all of the makeup you have?
2. **Too little storage space.** If there's very little storage space in the bathroom, most people won't put things away. And if your limited counter space is cluttered with bath and beauty products, there is even less space for the things you really need to use to get ready for

work. That means the morning routine becomes a big hassle, and who needs that extra stress when you're trying to get out the door?

3. **No clear organizational system that works for all family members.** If family members don't know where to put things, they will set them down on the closest horizontal surface. The bathroom counter becomes loaded with nail clippers, lotion, makeup, curlers, shaving creme, a curling iron, blower dryer, nail polish, aspirin, cold medicine, drinking glasses, reading glasses, and 20 other things. If you're giggling, then I've probably described your bathroom counter top.

Why live with the hassle of an inefficient bathroom? Wouldn't you love to have a less stressful morning and evening routine in a bathroom that is clean and organized? Decluttering and organizing your bathroom will make a big difference. And if you have unexpected company, having a clean bathroom will be a nice bonus.

Four Solutions

1. **Do a quick assessment** to see how much of the stuff in your bathroom you actually use and use regularly.

We have all purchased shampoo that we don't really like. But because we spent good money on it, we don't want to throw it out and be wasteful. Instead we save the many bottles and jars of things nobody in the family uses with the unconscious hope that we'll like them better another day or will use them when we run out of our favorites.

But five years later, the bottle of shampoo that makes your hair sticky and flat is still collecting dust and taking up valuable bathroom real estate.

It's time to get tough and get rid of everything you don't use. Why not donate it to a local shelter or advertise it as a freebee on your local www.freecycle.org group.

2. **Store the excess "off site."** If you have a very small bathroom, consider storing the excess in another location like a hall closet or back room. If you have 10 bath towels and wash cloths but only use two, why not keep the other 8 in another place until your house guests arrive and need towels?

If you have a year's supply of Kleenex, and toilet paper, store it somewhere else in your home. And when you stock up on your favorite shampoo and lotion, with the buy-two- get-one-free sale, store these items in your "off site" location too. Then when you need something, you can go "shopping" in your hall closet or back room.

3. **Have a place for everything** and get buy-in from the rest of the family to keep it organized. It will be a lot easier to create an organized bathroom once you've gotten rid of all of the excess, so do that step first.

Then assess what your biggest storage and organizational problems are. This step will guide you to solutions. For example, if you have more towels than storage space, consider rolling them up like logs and putting them in a cool wicker basket on the floor.

Why not hang your blow dryer from a hook and your water mug too? Is there open space above the door and window where a little shelf might work well?

4. **Use dividers and baskets in your drawers and cabinets to group like things.** I put all my make-up in a little basket so it's easy to take out of the cabinet and put back - just one motion. That's much easier than putting each item away. I also group lotions, and dental stuff, and over-the-counter medicine. In fact, I group everything because if I don't, I won't put things away either. I'm as lazy as the next person.

Next Steps

Keep your momentum going by selecting your next Harmonious Home project. Now that you're making progress with spiffing up your sanctuary, what's next? Maybe another room? Maybe some paint? Maybe some serious decluttering? Maybe a new streamlined system?

Help me spread the word

If you liked this program . . .

If you have found this program helpful, I would really appreciate receiving a short testimonial from you to place on my web page or other promotional materials. Sometimes it's a challenge getting the word out about programs like this. Your experience may be just the inspiration somebody needs to take action like you did. If you're wondering what you'd write, here are some ideas. It doesn't need to be a literary masterpiece—just jot down a few sentences. I'd be REALLY appreciative.

Ideas for writing a testimonial . . .

1. How did taking this program help you take action?
2. Did you feel adequately guided and supported?
3. Would you have taken these actions on your own without this program?
4. How do you feel about your accomplishments?
5. Who do you think would be most helped?
6. Would you recommend the program to others?

What information should I include about you . . .

When you email me your testimonial, let me know what information I can include about you when: just your initials, your first name, your first and last name, your profession/business, your city and/or state. If you have a photo of yourself, send that along.

It's been swell working through this program with you! Thanks for being a part of it. Cheryl