



Organize to Minimize!

The more organized your space, the more stuff
it will accommodate

By Georgie Binks

You've spent weeks going through your belongings, decluttering rooms, and holding garage sales to make sure everything will fit into your new, smaller space. Once you've moved, however, you realize to your horror that it's still not all going to fit. What to do?

We've contacted organizing professionals coast-to-coast, and

they've come up with a bunch of solutions to help you squeeze every bit of living space out of your new, more compact home.

Kitchen

It's important when you tackle each room to look at the big picture—which really is the new, smaller picture. Maybe you were used to having three

Photo: Balonccc/Dreamstime

kids running around in the kitchen and needed a lot of space before. Or perhaps you were addicted to a cooking channel and bought every gadget you could find. Now's the time to take a look at your kitchen appliances and gadgets and see what works best for you.

"You can do a ton of fabulous cooking with nothing much more than a couple of good knives and a basic set of good, quality cookware," says Faye Plant of Edmonton. "I have a lot of friends with unused bread machines, cappuccino machines, pasta makers... clever things that have only one function, are quite large, and don't get used regularly. A knife is really easy to clean—a mini food processor to chop the garlic, not so much."

Kim Eagles of Kaos Solutions in Moncton, NB, suggests that you figure out what you use regularly and put anything you don't use in a storage area, maybe an extra closet. That way valuable kitchen space isn't wasted.

Hire a carpenter to increase shelving in cupboards where there's more space; this can often double the amount of room you have. Use the inside of cupboard doors for racks to hold everything from spices to food wrap.

Space-saving gadgets can also make a lot of room for you. There are also under-the-cabinet radio/CD or TV/DVD combinations that allow you to have home entertainment in the kitchen without losing valuable counter space. Kitchen gadgets ranging from toaster ovens and coffee makers to microwaves and can

openers can also be mounted underneath kitchen cabinets.

If that still doesn't give you enough room and you have the budget, consider bigger changes. When Cheryl Green of Vancouver moved from a large house to a smaller condo, she bought smaller appliances:

"I went with a smaller cooktop because I never cook with more than two burners at a time. It also has a smaller oven, but I can still cook a turkey in it or make three trays of cookies at a time. As well, I bought a smaller fridge that's integrated into the cabinets so it creates more space in the kitchen."

Everything below the counter should be pull out, above should be cupboards. If you don't have drawers below the counter, Janis Nylund of Orderly Concepts and Solutions in Surrey, BC, suggests buying plastic storage drawers to place under the counter. It's easier to see what's there and to get at it.

Having a smaller kitchen doesn't

Many kitchen gadgets can be mounted under your kitchen cabinets to save space.

mean you can't still buy in bulk. Try shopping with a neighbour and split your haul.

Dining Room

Ask yourself how your new downsized life will affect your social life. Will you be hosting big dinners or just inviting friends for cocktails and heading out for dinner?

“Doing this can potentially eliminate a lot of dishes and glassware,” says Natasha Solvason of Home Free Organizing Solutions in Saskatoon. “Large serving trays and bowls as well as fine china can be passed on to children or grandchildren who have the space to entertain large groups of people.”

Then take a look at your furniture. Bulky hutches, tables, and chairs can make a room feel more cluttered. Try to find smaller, more streamlined items. Taller, slimmer furniture can



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make a room feel bigger and give you more space. Consider benches, which can also accommodate more people than chairs.

Karen Shinn of Toronto’s Downsizing Diva says, if you’re getting rid of the buffet, don’t forget what’s

inside it. You may have to declutter even more or use what’s in there differently. For instance, she says, “Use the good dishes. You don’t need two sets. The same goes for the silver and the crystal.”

As well, Shinn suggests using furniture that has storage space. “If you have the choice of a table or a chest of drawers that take up the same amount of space, use the chest of drawers.”

She also suggests double-duty furniture. Cheryl Green says, “I got new bar stools that will actually go down far enough that I can use them at the dining room table when we have guests.”

Photo: Maimahochi/istock/Dreamstime.

On the other hand, maybe you're ready to chuck the dining room. If you have a nice enough eating space in the kitchen, you can always just dress up your table with fancy place settings and candles when guests arrive. Then repurpose the dining room into an office, sitting room, or library.

Living Room

One problem a lot of people run into when they downsize is fitting larger furniture from their old space into a smaller area, and that's especially true of living room furniture. Eagles says, "You want less furniture but a bigger piece of it. Instead of having a couch, a love seat, and a bunch of chairs, one big sectional works really well and makes the room look bigger. You wouldn't think it, but it streamlines the space."

Custom-made storage areas such as bookshelves or wall units can also handle much of the overflow. Anne Moon of Victoria recalls, "My best idea was to get a custom-made wall unit, which moves from apartment to apartment and contains shelves, drawers, glass curio display shelves, even a drop-down flap for mixing drinks."

Multi-use furniture is also a great way to create space. If you're buying a couch, why not buy a sofa bed for when guests arrive? There are also coffee tables these days that convert into dining room or work station tables. Chaise lounges can be used as a single bed.



Natasha Solvason says the best double-duty piece of furniture for living rooms is an ottoman that can double as a storage unit. "They're perfect for grandchildren's toys, blankets, and games. These come in various sizes and styles. Fabric-covered padded ottomans can also be used as additional seating." She also suggests transforming an old chest into a coffee table by adding legs, which provides great places to store games and blankets.

Instead of an entertainment unit, you can save space by placing the television on the top of a dresser, sideboard, or cabinet and using the inside to store TV-related equipment, movies, photo albums, and CDs. A

Photo: iStockphoto/Thinkstock.

flat-screen TV hung on the wall also provides more space.

Bedroom

When you decide how to furnish your bedroom, everything from smaller or more versatile furniture to built-ins and great storage will all give you more

downsized from a home to a smaller condo, says, “We went with a Murphy bed with bookcases to maximize a small space while having a guest bed.”

Good storage space is essential in the bedroom. Closet space can be increased by installing organizing systems that give you two levels of



room. Again consider downsizing furniture in the bedroom. Eagles says that, as in the dining room, tall, slimmer furniture for the bedroom provides more space. Building shelving on each side of the bed and across the top will give you extra storage space for books and knick-knacks.

Of course, the ultimate in space-saving furniture is a bed that folds up against the wall when not in use and these are manufactured by several different companies. They're especially popular for accommodating guests. Catherine Daw of Toronto, who

hanging closet space. Eagles says, “From my experience, drawers just don't work. They're okay for socks and underwear, but for t-shirts and sweaters they don't work well.”

Instead use baskets, roll out containers, and storage cubes to handle those items.

Storage under the bed is also a great way to handle off-season clothing; containers with wheels make moving it back and forth easier. And you can save space by putting clothes in plastic storage bags that can be sealed airtight by vacuuming the air out.

Photo: Barbara Helgeson/Dreamstime.

Shinn suggests that, with the new high ceilings in some condos, space higher up in closets is an unused goldmine, sometimes providing as much as an extra metre or so (three to four feet).

She points out that you don't need to create a second bedroom for the occasional guest if you live in a condo or retirement home because many offer guest suites.

Bathrooms

There never seems to be enough space in the bathroom, so another decluttering session might be in order. Catherine Daw says, "I got rid of every extra, partly used bottle of anything and only buy more when needed."

Eagles says bath towels are another problem. "How many towels do you really need? Store only things you need and use on a daily or weekly basis in the bathroom."

She says a nifty way to store towels is by using wine racks that attach to walls.

Pedestal sinks are out in a small space—sinks with cabinets are much better because they provide storage.

Solvason says, "I like to purchase baskets for each member of the home for the bathroom so they can easily grab the basket when they're preparing for the day and everything they need is all in one place. They can be stored in drawers, cabinets, or linen closets."

Front Hallway

If you have a closet, make sure there

are multiple levels of hanging space. Hooks can also work well to hold more items. Keep only what you are using at the moment, Eagles says. Cubbies are great for shoes.

Karen Shinn swears by small cubes stacked one on top of the other in her front hall cupboard.



Laundry

Double stacking washers and dryers are all the rage these days. The latest gadget in space saving is a combination washer and dryer that takes up only the space of one appliance.

Storage room

Most condos have a storage room, and these days it's not uncommon for people to purchase storage areas for all their extra belongings. If you're worried you'll forget where things are stored (and that's easy to do), store your belongings in clear, labelled boxes, Shinn suggests. As well, make a list of everything you're putting in storage so that you don't go out and replace stuff you already own. ■