



De-Junking

A Tool for Clutter-Busting

Mark A. Burch



Simplicity Practice and Resource Centre
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada



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**Simplicity Practice and
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P.O. Box 68005, Winnipeg,
Manitoba, Canada, R3L 2V9
info@simplicitycentre.org
www.simplicitycentre.org

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What is De-Junking ?

De-junking is getting rid of clutter and material complication. It's the first step in simplifying your outer life. De-junking is a real-life, practical way to begin simplifying. Each person can decide how much they want to de-junk. You can also decide what areas of your life you want to simplify first. There are no rules where to begin, how far to go, or when to start. But like every real life change, we have to start sometime. *Remember the Chinese saying:*

**"Every journey of a thousand miles
begins with the first step."**



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Baby Steps to Giant Steps

Tips for de-junking are listed below in groups related to some aspect of your life or household. The suggestions in each group begin with easy things to do. As you go down the list, you move closer and closer to “hard-core” simplicity. The dramatic lifestyle changes implied by some of the more extreme steps are not something that we necessarily suggest for everyone, and certainly not for families. We believe that simplicity, like any other lifestyle choice, can be taken too far, or rather, to the point where the practice of simple living can wind up

compromising other important values such as relationships, health, social inclusion, etc. The fact remains, however, that there are both historical and contemporary examples of individuals who have made such choices and as such, they represent real life possibilities for those wishing to follow such examples. We believe that the question of how far to proceed down the list is a choice that each individual must weigh for him or herself against the gains (or losses) in freedom and quality of life that can be achieved by that particular choice.

Beginning steps simply suggest ways of reducing waste without really reducing what we use. Later steps chip away at what we have accumulated but don't use. Finally, there are steps which come closer to the heart of voluntary simplicity requiring much closer attention to exactly what and how much we do use and to what ends. We cite the sources of tips when we know what they are. We've also tried to include only tips that directly contribute to voluntary simplicity through reducing consumption. We have not included other more general actions which promote personal or environmental health. These may be very worthwhile, but in this de-junking guide, we've tried to stay close to the theme of simple living, rather than mixing it up with more general suggestions for promoting health and environmental harmony.



Why De-Junk?

The first thing to understand is that in de-junking we aren't suggesting painful separations from material things which really matter in our lives. The goal of voluntary simplicity is not to make our lives harder, more sterile or emptier. Quite the reverse! In de-junking we're shedding junk, all the stuff that "stuffs us up." We've done a good round of de-junking if we feel lighter, freer, and happier afterward. It should also be clear that our overall quality of life has increased rather than decreased after de-junking.

There are many good reasons for de-junking:

- **By reducing junk and clutter, we trim our possessions to those things we really use.** This makes everything easier to find and keep track of, which in turn saves time and energy. It means that the pace of our lives can slow a little and that we require less searching for what we need to enjoy the day.
- **By de-junking, we may discover that we need less living space, less expensive storage space, maybe even a smaller house or apartment.** This can greatly reduce our cost of living, cost of insurance, and the time needed to take care of our living quarters. People who live in apartments, condos or other rental accommodations sometimes have to pay extra for storage space. De-junking may free up so much space that you can do without the shed or secure storage cupboard in the basement.
- **By de-junking, we may free up goods, or at least recyclable resources which are of use or value to other people.** Wouldn't you really rather recycle the twelve cases of empties in the garage than leave them there taking up space? And isn't it more sensible that the clothes we will never wear again clothe someone who needs them rather than taking up space in our closet?
- **De-junking can save time by simplifying housekeeping and cleaning tasks.** There is less to dust, to wash, to wax, to polish and to move back and forth in order to clean floors, etc.
- **De-junking can free up time, energy and attention for other members of the family or household.** The less we rely on "toys" for amusement, the more we naturally turn to each other. De-junking can thus contribute directly to strengthening family bonds and communities.



De-Junking With Mindfulness

Voluntary simplicity is based on mindfulness and bringing a sense of mindful attention to everything we do. Mindfulness applies equally strongly to de-junking. But what can it mean to “de-junk with mindfulness”?

To start, we need to appreciate that we have all grown up in consumer culture and this culture teaches us to strongly associate security, safety and well-being with our material possessions. It's also true that even people who have not grown up in a consumer culture still are capable of connecting strong emotions and meanings to material objects—totems, amulets, temples and other artifacts. In North America, however, our “things” are often extensions of our identities—the objects that broadcast to others the sort of person we want them to think we are. Material things also help us remember significant events and relationships. It's often the case in floods

and house fires, for example, that even as the family clears out of the house, they are also carrying picture albums rather than television sets or hair dryers.

Despite the fact that we love our stuff, we also sometimes hate it. The very same things that help us feel secure and proclaim our identity to the world can become a prison of clutter, expense, stress, and a major nuisance. Many new houses now have double or triple car garages not for more cars, but simply to store all the other toys and gear the family thinks it “needs.” So “clearing the decks”, “spring house cleaning” and a “fresh slate” can all have strong positive emotions connected to them as well.

Whenever something like material possessions can be linked to both strong positive and negative emotions and associations, it is well for us to proceed slowly, with close attention to how we feel, and thoughtfulness about the consequences of our choices—whether to de-junk something or to keep it.

Another aspect of mindfulness of our attachments to material things is becoming aware of how much of this may be based on fear—even if partly unconscious. How many of our possessions do we keep “just in case” we might want them again in the future, or in case of an “emergency”, or because we are afraid we might not be able to find another one such if we need it again, etc. We also cling to possessions that were an important part of past interests, activities, and capacities which we may realize, upon sober second thought, will not be needed in the future. Releasing gracefully the objects of past affection and interest also implies mindfulness of how our lives and capabilities change continually. Are we clinging to these things because there’s a real chance we’ll use them again, or in some attempt to slow down the stream of time? Can we see change as something that is opening new possibilities to us rather than tearing us away from old attachments?

So we suggest that you approach your de-junking activities with mindfulness—in fact, even with a formal mindfulness practice if possible. This might include taking time to sit still, relax, and just spend some time centering your heart and mind on the task at hand. Make a “meditation” out of it and bring a meditative spirit to your work.

There is no hurry. Maybe you've spent a lifetime accumulating all this stuff, so take whatever time you need to feel and know its true place and value in your life. Make your decisions from a settled spirit, not in some excited enthusiasm or a too-casual off-hand sort of way. Only by growing in mindfulness can we feel the full weight of what imprisons us and hunger for release, or the true depth of connection we have with precious objects of spiritual and emotional significance that we want to keep.

One further consideration of which we should be mindful is what we might call the "justice" aspect of our possessions. We arrive at awareness of this by asking the question: "Is my possession of this thing which I am not using depriving someone else of the use of it who needs it?" Principles of natural justice teach us that if someone else is in need and we possess the means of helping them, then we also have a moral responsibility to do so. This principle, that responsibility attaches to the possession of things, is one we don't hear much about today. But it is nevertheless true, and we can feel the goodness of this truth when we act on the principle.

You can begin de-junking by first picking an area of your life or household with which it is "safe" to experiment. For example, you may not be keen on tackling the kitchen or the basement on the first pass. Okay. So don't do a whole room! Start with one of the dresser drawers in your bedroom, or the hardware drawer in the kitchen. Work on the linen closet or a corner of the garage. But do start somewhere, and do start now. Also take time as you de-junk to be mindful in what you're doing, and especially how you feel as you go about de-junking this aspect of your life. If getting rid of spare nails, burnt out light bulbs and broken Christmas ornaments is something that causes you anxiety or sadness, take time to look more deeply into the nature of these feelings. Ask yourself how such feelings came to

Simplicity is an exact medium between
too little and too much.

—Sir Joshua Reynolds

be associated with these particular things? If you feel relief, lightness, freedom, or pleasure as your linen closet gradually becomes tidier, more streamlined and less cluttered, let yourself enjoy those feelings as you go about your de-junking work.

Begin de-junking with things that are outer, i.e., physical, material things, which have little or no emotional meaning for you. Then gradually work into less material things (e.g., services, memberships, heirlooms, etc.) which may have more “emotional charge.”

If you are considering de-junking stuff but you still feel attached to it, or you’re not sure whether you’ll need it again, arrange a trial separation. Do this by carefully packing the stuff away and leaving it in a special corner of the garage or basement. Date the box. If you don’t go searching for the contents within a year, then kiss it goodbye!

Another approach to de-junking that some people find useful, especially if you have the task of say cleaning up an estate following the death of a family member, we call the “Five Pile Method”. For any given “unit” of de-junking (closet, drawer, room, etc.) make five piles:

Pile 1 – Keepers. The Keepers pile includes things of real value, in good repair, or of strong emotional significance that it is inconceivable to discard. These will be re-stored or retained for later use.

Pile 2 – Re-Usables. The Re-Usables pile includes things which have value but might need repair, or which you’re sure you don’t need, but that someone else might have a use for. These can be set aside for donation to a used goods store or yard sale.

Pile 3 – Recyclables. The Recyclables pile includes things that are broken beyond repair or use by anyone but which nevertheless are made of recyclable materials or materials which will not degrade in a landfill. These objects can be placed in the blue box or taken to a recycling centre.

Pile 4 – Tossers. The Tossers pile should be very small and include only things which cannot be reused or recycled. These things will be sometimes complex in their construction, some made of “composite” materials or non-disassemblable or non-recyclable materials that the only option is disposal in the garbage.

Pile 5 – Doubtfuls. The Doubtfuls pile includes things that cannot be placed in any of piles 1-4. These will be things that are too good to throw away, recycle or discard right now, but the future need for which remains somewhat uncertain. Pile 5 items go into the “trial separation” category where we store them for a year or so and then part with them only when we are fairly sure no future need will arise.

Finally, nothing says you have to approach de-junking like breaking an addiction “cold turkey”. If you call the family together some sunny Saturday morning and announce that by the end of the day, you want to see a 90% reduction in your level of materialism, chances are that someone will toss something that someone else will regret. Making progress toward simple living is a journey of many steps. There are new skills to learn and adjustments to make which take time. We aren’t learning to be happy with less so much as to be happy differently. Simplifying involves stripping away one layer after another and discovering or creating the lifestyle shift which occurs with each layer. When we’ve made the shift, we usually discover that we want to peel away yet another layer. And so it goes. This process may take several months, or for some people, several years. Changes of career and residence are usually not possible overnight, and such decisions probably should not be made impulsively.

Streamlining –

The Gentle Art of Self-Liberation



Banking And Finance

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Over the last twenty-five years, financial “services” in North America have grown increasingly complex and expensive. Service charges are now a major source of revenue for banks and a major cost to customers. Many financial institutions offer “packages” of services with such a bewildering array of options, conditions and special charges that it’s almost impossible to compare the packages of different institutions, or understand how monthly charges are calculated. Finally, many financial institutions produce large amounts of promotional “literature” for special deals on credit, mortgages, frequent flyer points or credit incentive give-aways every year. When this stuff arrives in your mailbox, it’s probably junk mail to you and winds up becoming a waste management problem for society. Here are some tips for de-junking the financial services side of life:

1. **Reduce your bank accounts to just one account in one bank or credit union.** More accounts seldom multiplies your pleasure in managing your financial affairs, but it does multiply chances for making mistakes on recording transactions as well as paper work at the end of the month.
2. **Ask to have no promotional mail sent to you concerning mutual funds, bargains on mortgages, etc.**
3. **Weigh carefully the pros and cons of special service packages that involve services you never or seldom use.** Review your financial transactions for the past year. If you haven't used service X in the last twelve months, is it really a selling point to buy a package of services which includes service X? Note that the main attraction of many of these packages is that you feel you have the "option" to use this or that service, whether or not you need it or have actually used it in the past. But do you need this service often? Seldom? Ever? What does it cost you to have this "option" available even though you never use it, as compared to the cost of actually purchasing the service on the rare occasions when you need it?
4. **Review your need for property and life insurance.** After several rounds of simplifying and de-junking, you may discover that you don't need as much insurance. The need for life insurance can vary a great deal depending on your age, health, and family obligations. Remarking on the over-concern that some people have with life insurance, Henry David Thoreau once wrote: "Is it really necessary that a man be concerned to bury himself?" In Canada, every person paying into the Canada Pension Plan is entitled to a \$2,500 death benefit which is ample funds to pay for a simple funeral.
5. **Eliminate your bank account and deal only in cash.** All retailers who accept credit cards must mark up their

merchandise to cover the service charges on credit sales—usually about 3%. But some retailers will offer discounts to customers paying in cash. If you aren't using a credit card, why pay for the service?

6. **Reduce credit cards to just one.** Having one credit card may be convenient or even necessary for making hotel or airline reservations and for emergency purchases (if they are truly emergencies), but who needs more than one of them? Credit cards carry the highest interest charges of any legal payment instrument and have been the slippery slope to bankruptcy for many otherwise intelligent people.



Photo Credit: Photographs by Sean Hogan

Our life is frittered away by detail...
Simplify, simplify, simplify!

—Henry David Thoreau

7. **Don't use "credit".** Paying in cash may "hurt," but at least the money you spend is visible and therefore more controllable. Make no mistake, "credit" is really just a nice word for debt. Many people find it's easier to stay within a fixed budget if they don't use credit at all. Another tip to keep control on use of credit is to record every transaction in your cheque book just as if it were a cheque. Instead of logging a cheque number, just write "CC" in the book and subtract the charged amount from your running balance. At the end of the month, pay your entire credit card balance with a single transfer from chequeing. With this system, all financial transactions for the month are "visible" and you can live within your means by not overdrawing your chequeing account.

Many financial institutions also charge fees for withdrawals from ATMs (automated teller machines) or for debit-card payments. Be familiar with the charges levied by your financial institution. Avoid using such services if you can, but if you can't, also subtract each service charge from your chequebook record as you incur them. This makes them visible and gives you a more accurate idea of how much money you really have in your account.

Finally, you can use this sort of system to reduce service charges for cheques by using a credit card instead, just as if you were writing cheques, and then pay with a single transfer rather than many cheques.

8. **Discard special offer cards, e.g., "Airmiles" card; "Club Z Points," etc.** Read the fine print on these. Figure out just how much you would have to spend at the store sponsoring these promotions to ever qualify for a meaningful "prize." Think back to how much you've spent at this store in the past. Is it worth the extra time, complication, and hassle? Is it worth the extra junk mail you get from this merchant? Is it worth having every transaction you make monitored and stored by "data mining" companies that use it to target you

with even more advertising? And is flying around an earth-friendly way to travel anyway?

9. **If it sounds too good to be true...** Always remember that financial institutions of all kinds exist to extract wealth from you (their “customers”) and transfer it to their shareholders. None can operate at a loss, and seldom will they offer “special deals” with full disclosure. Avoid all promotions, high pressure bargains and loyalty schemes. Despite the attractive sounding advertising slogans, no financial institution is interested in “helping” you achieve freedom—and certainly not from them.
10. **Discard all records, receipts, papers, etc., not required or likely to be required by law.** Tax laws require that records be kept for seven years, but in practice, few private individuals are ever audited farther back than three years. You may want to keep receipts on purchases of items with warranties, but your grocery receipts? Really?
11. **Eliminate cash and barter/trade instead.** Barter and trade are the most direct and human forms of exchange. Extensive barter and direct trade networks are springing up all over North America to support barter exchange, especially among people less well served by our current economic and political system. We strongly endorse barter/trade transactions as a way of deleting the cost, time, and complications that go with many layers of “middle people”

Maybe a person's time would be as well spent
raising food as raising money to buy food. —Frank A. Clark

between the producer and consumer of a good or service. Be advised however, that barter transactions are usually taxable in many North American jurisdictions.

- 12. Eliminate barter/trade and live on begging, dumpster-diving, subsistence gardening or hunting/gathering.** Definitely a “hard core” simplicity strategy and not recommended for everyone. Those who follow in the steps of the philosophers and sages are not well-respected or protected in our society, so this approach is an opportunity both to eliminate all sorts of complicated shenanigans associated with living in a cash economy, but also a chance to grow in detachment from what society calls “reputation,” “respectability,” and false “self-sufficiency.”

Many of us today live in highly “monetized” economies—that is, economies that insert monetary exchange (buying/selling) between people and the goods and services required to meet their needs. So, most of us have grown up thinking that in order to eat, we must earn money which we then exchange to buy food. But another alternative is simply to grow our own food, or gather food growing in nature, or go fishing or hunting, or beg food from someone else, or recover food which has been discarded by someone else, or combinations of these. All are forms of “direct production” or “production for own consumption” and require no money—although some require access to other resources such as land for gardens, or productive wild areas where foods can be harvested. Nevertheless, the principle holds: We often think we must buy things that we can obtain in other ways or produce ourselves if that pleases us.

Photo Credit: Photographs by Sean Hogan



Clothing

The fashion industry in North America is a major industrial engine, a major consumer of resources, and a major stimulator of personal consumption. Almost everyone wants to look presentable and clothing can be a form of self-expression. Nevertheless, the clothing industry invests massively in the artificial stimulation of our desire for new clothing by changing fashions on a seasonal basis and constructing clothing to have a very short service life. Both of these activities are exploitative of the basic human need for handsome, simple, and easy to maintain clothing. Moreover, clothing is different from food. We can eat only so much food and then we must stop. But the only limit on our clothing purchases is our budget, our closet space, or ideally, our consciousness of what is really necessary and appropriate. Hence, meeting our clothing needs is a fertile area in which to practice voluntary simplicity.

1. **Donate all clothing you haven't worn during the last year.** Let's face it, if you live in a part of the world that has changing seasons and you've gone a full round of those seasons without wearing your old Nehru jacket, isn't it time to say good-bye to it? And how likely is it that you'll really lose that extra ten kilos that makes a lot of those other clothes unwearable? We need enough clothing to meet the seasons with adequate protection and some measure of presentability. We probably don't need a stockpile of "clothing memories" spanning who knows how many decades, moods and possible social activities.
2. **Donate all formal wear.** Maybe you move in circles or have a job where you need your tux at least once a week. But most formal wear for most people is a single occasion garment and, for those special occasions, it may be better rented than owned. Moreover, many formal occasions are consumption extravaganzas literally designed to flaunt both wealth and waste. By all means attend, especially if the music is good. But bring an apple if you wish and wear your jeans proudly!
3. **Eliminate all furs and leather products made from animal skins.** There is no real need for 21st century humans to continue to kill animals and wear their pelts. There has been much public education on this one over the last twenty years so we won't belabor the point. Leather tanning industries are some of the most polluting of enterprises. Purchase, cleaning and storage of furs and leather goods is costly, both financially and environmentally. Life is simpler and just as comfortable if we stick with fiber-based garments.
4. **Reduce or eliminate jewelry.** Only humans use jewelry. Some of the most energy-intensive and environmentally-damaging human activities include mining the metals and

stones used to make jewelry. The ultimate in pointless environmental damage is the mining of diamonds. They are much more common than we have been led to believe, however, diamonds have been marketed into rarity and high fashion by the diamond industry and sold at artificially high prices. Save yourself a bundle of money and the planet a bundle of harm. Enjoy the diamonds that sparkle in the night sky and liberally on the surface of lakes. Let your skin glow with the golden warmth of love and health. Then who needs gold? We can also rediscover the beauty of wooden rings, glass and clay beads, and other home-made/handmade adornments constructed from environmentally friendly materials close at hand. In ancient times, long before Olympic competitors earned gold, silver and bronze medallions, athletes were given wreaths of laurel or olive to wear. Their honor was no less on that account.

5. **Learn to sew.** Making your own clothes can be relaxing and artistic as well as thrifty. Make new items from old garments. Repair clothing instead of buying something new.
6. **Donate all clothing except what is needed for one month of each season.** For practitioners of voluntary simplicity, this is a liberal clothing allotment, but it might be a good initial target for the “pare to” point of your wardrobe.
7. **Donate all clothing except what is needed for one week.** Have you noticed how when you travel, you can usually do

The sculptor produces the beautiful statue by chipping away such parts of the marble block as are not needed - it is a process of elimination.

—Elbert Hubbard

just fine by packing for one week and then just laundering your clothes? Consider whether living this way might be possible all the time.

8. **Sleep without pajamas.** Sensuous, thrifty and simple!
9. **Donate all except two changes of clothing.** Hard-core simplicity here, but worth a try. Just think, if you did this, you could probably also get rid of the washer and dryer! Buddhist monks still revere the ideal of owning only one robe and one bowl. We suggest one change of clothes to cover laundry day!
10. **Adopt “Anti-fashion” fashion.** There are now companies that are specializing in high quality, durable clothing lines in classic styles that represent timeless, or nearly so, fashions. This type of clothing may be higher priced than other clothing but very well-manufactured and durable. Wrinkle-resistant, easy-care travel clothing are offered in many styles. In all cases you will spend more in the short run, but wind up spending less in the long run as the clothes last longer.



Diet

Few people would argue that food is a necessity and tasty food is one of life's intrinsic pleasures. But in satisfying our need for food and our desire for variety, visual attractiveness and good taste, there is a wide range of options. North American food industries have tried hard to expand those options, or to apparently expand them, since most food products are made from the same few ingredients, such as corn and soy products. The price of expanding our food options and increasing the percentage of meat in the North American diet has not only meant more expensive food, but a food production system which is a leading source of environmental impact on the planet.

In general, the more meat we eat, the more prepared the food, the more packaged it is, and the longer it is stored, then the more expensive the food is and the greater the environmental impact of its production, processing, distribution and marketing. The food that has the least environmental impact is probably the wild raspberry we pick and eat on the spot. Alternatively, it is the organic vegetable we grow in our backyard and then consume five minutes later fifty feet away in a raw vegetable salad. This food is also probably the cheapest to produce and the simplest to prepare. It can also be varied and attractive.

It is also well to keep in mind that many people see the operation of our food system as an ethical issue as well as a health concern. Standard production techniques for many varieties of livestock subject animals to unnecessary suffering and unhealthy, unpleasant living conditions. Finding our way toward food production systems that do no harm and inflict no suffering on humans or animals is a goal that many can endorse.

The “de-junking” proposals concerning diet aim to reduce the cost of food, the environmental impact of its production, the complexity of its preparation and the tools needed to do so. We also aim to reinforce recent recommendations for reducing overall intake of dietary fats and refined sugars and increasing sources of dietary fiber and grain products.

1. **Reduce intake of red meats.** This contributes to simplicity by reducing your individual impact on the land through consumption of meat products, reduces expenditures for food, and improves personal health by reducing dietary fats. Adopt more plant-based protein alternatives if you like, or use meat sparingly as a garnish or flavor source without making it the centre of attention.
2. **Reduce intake of all animal products.** Animal products like dairy and meat products usually contain high levels of fat. Animals must be fed grain which they convert to protein rather inefficiently. They must also be housed, medicated

and transported. While meat is a source of concentrated protein, its cost in money, energy and environmental damage is high.

3. **Reduce consumption of highly processed and packaged foods and convenience foods.** This contributes to simplicity again by saving money, reducing environmental impact, and reducing the need for specialized appliances, e.g., microwave ovens, popcorn poppers, wiener warmers, etc., and increases our quality of life by providing incentives to participate directly in the preparation of our own food. Eat



Photo Credit: Photographs by Sean Hogan

Who is rich?
He who rejoices in his portion.

—The Talmud

more whole, raw and unprocessed foods which conserve nutrients and flavor values, as well as reducing preparation time.

4. **Reduce/eliminate use of salt and sugar.** Substitute more natural sweeteners such as honey, maple syrup or stevia. While these changes don't necessarily save you money or simplify cooking, they do contribute to better health and reduce environmental impacts from activities like unsustainable sugar production.
5. **Reduce waste.** A significant fraction of the food, condiments and spices used in North American households are simply thrown away because they are past their "best before" dates. Don't buy any more spices or condiments until you've used all of what you have up. You may find many tasty spices at the back of your cupboard that you forgot you had! Moreover, spend a little extra time in meal planning so that portion sizes are appropriate to both health and economy. Many times we can be tempted to over-eat, or else discard eatable food because too much was served in the first place. This is expensive, can be unhealthy, and is always environmentally harmful.
6. **Become vegetarian.** Vegetarian cuisine generally runs lower on the food chain and lower on the budgetary bottom line than a meaty diet. If everyone on Earth were vegetarian, the planet could probably feed us all adequately. If everyone adopted a North American diet, either the planet couldn't produce it, or some would starve.
7. **Become vegan.** The ultimate limit of the vegetarian option where not even eggs or dairy products are consumed. Undoubtedly a healthy option, but it requires care to assure adequate supplies of all necessary amino acids (proteins) and B vitamins. Also be sure to consult a dietary counselor

or health care professional if you have any physical conditions which might be adversely affected by a vegan food regimen.

8. **Eat locally produced foods.** A significant fraction of the environmental impact of food production arises from transporting food great distances so that we can enjoy out-of-season foods all year around. There's no question that this is enjoyable, but the environmental and energy cost—to say nothing of the financial cost—is high. Rediscover the delights of recipes using locally produced foods. This can save money and ecological damage even as it stimulates our creativity to use what is at hand to create delicious, nutritious meals. Remember, in almost every region of the world, people once lived healthy lives before we invented the globalized food trading system!
9. **Walk to the grocery store.** You'll buy less and have more fresh produce on hand more often. Less groceries means less storage space and freezing.
10. **Make water your favorite drink.** Water is essential to life and generally still free, or very low cost. Many soft drinks and alcoholic beverages contribute significantly to weight gain, obesity, tooth decay, and early onset diabetes. It's easy to make tasty herbal teas from herbs and flowers you

Be content with what you have,
rejoice in the way things are.
When you realize there is nothing lacking,
the whole world belongs to you.

can gather in forests and meadows, or which can be grown in your own flower box, balcony container or garden. DO learn to accurately identify wild plants before harvesting them. There are many books available from public libraries that can help you accurately identify wild herbs.

Avoid drinking bottled water unless your community faces serious health issues from municipal water supplies. Most communities in North America, however, have excellent quality municipal water which is available cheaply or for free while bottled water may be no purer but several thousand times more costly and transported considerable distances in plastic bottles that are highly polluting to manufacture.

11. **Plant an organic garden.** It is currently estimated that the average mouthful of North American food travels 1,500 km from where it is produced to where it is consumed. Your backyard garden shortens this loop considerably, bringing fresh food to your table from a garden you manage yourself. Such gardens save the planet an immense amount of fossil fuels, energy, tire rubber and water, as well as saving you money.
12. **Grow your own herbs.** You can grow your own herbs for seasoning dishes or making teas and home remedies. Herbs can be easily grown in flower pots on a windowsill, a flower box or planter, or outdoors in a garden if you have space.
13. **Fast.** The ultimate in dietary simplicity. Many people maintain that periodic gentle fasting is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle.



Employment

Most of us must work to live, but the voluntary simplicity movement questions whether it is healthy to live to work! The matter of our employment is a major issue affecting our income, future financial security, sense of meaning in life, and contribution to the community. Some pop culture portrayals of simple living suggest that it is merely a “leisure expansion movement” as if the whole purpose of simplifying was merely to expand idleness. Nothing could be further from the truth!

One goal of a simple life is to create a healthy work-life balance, also to keep work in perspective relative to other life values, and finally and especially, not to avoid work, but to find good work—ways of making a living that contribute to both our individual and also community and planetary well-being. “Simplifying employment” is not a simple matter. But here are some things to consider:

1. **Be mindful of the full costs of working.** We usually think only of the income that employment can provide without also balancing this off against the costs of having a job. Every sort of work situation costs money—and hence some measure of our life/time. In deciding to move from part-time to full-time employment or vice-versa, in accepting promotions or raises, in pursuing increased work responsibilities, we often fail to consider what these changes will cost, and whether the benefits of a change outweigh the costs sufficiently to make it a wise choice to change.

Consider doing a “balance sheet” for any employment you’re thinking of entering. In the credit column, list your income and any other benefits being offered. But also set up a debit column which honestly lists all the costs associated with this position: transportation, day care, special clothes, meals out, time used to commute, training programs you have to pay for yourself, contributions or donations that will be expected by your co-workers, extra expenses you may incur for “compensations” you offer yourself for working overtime or being away from your family a lot, drugs you may have to take to help you with stress, counseling you might need, etc. Add these up and make an honest assessment before making your decision.

2. **Consider non-traditional work.** There are many ways to obtain the income we need—and we need little since we are living simply!—besides a traditional, full-time job. It is often possible to fashion combinations of part-time jobs, seasonal

employment, self-employment, contract work, etc., to maintain more control over your hours, your income, and your working conditions. While full-time jobs offer a certain predictability and pseudo-security of employment, all of your living depends on pleasing one employer. This can be extremely stressful in its own way compared to taking a less secure, but perhaps more casual approach to earning money. It can also be helpful not to take on a particular “career identity”—I am a plumber, or I am a lawyer, and that’s it—but instead to develop oneself as a multi-skilled, multi-talented worker, open to many different kinds of income-generating work. Over time, we can develop a very powerful portfolio of career experiences that can build a momentum and identity all its own.

3. **Consider “production for own consumption”.** Most of us work for others because we are deeply socialized to life within a market economy. We earn money because we’ve been taught that money is what we need to acquire everything else we need. But many of life’s necessities can be produced directly without the use of money. If we grow our own food, then we don’t need money to buy food. While being totally self-sufficient is probably impossible today, it is possible to

A man must be able to cut a knot,
for everything cannot be untied;
he must know how to disengage what is essential
from the detail in which it is enwrapped,
for everything cannot be equally considered;
in a word, he must be able to simplify his duties,
his business and his life.

be more self-reliant in many ways, and thus increase our material security without necessarily having to work for money to do so. Efforts aimed at self-reliance can also become income opportunities in their own right. It's a small step from keeping a few bees to produce one's own honey to selling honey to others.

4. **Consider cooperation.** Consumer culture in North America indoctrinates us strongly to individualism and to thinking that we must learn to meet all our needs on our own. Cooperatives, however, are powerful organizational tools that allow people to enter cooperative enterprises which can avoid the economic parasitism of employment within corporations or other forms of business. We can lighten the load on ourselves by cooperating with others to meet common needs together such as housing, transportation, food production, financial services, etc. There is no economic or life need of individuals which cannot be met cooperatively at less input of time and energy.
5. **Always work the "demand side".** Consumer culture also strongly indoctrinates us to look to the "supply side" of our income in meeting needs—that is, for any question, e.g., housing, always to think about how to earn more rather than need less. Whenever we feel a "pinch" between the income we have and our expenses, it's an opportunity to become more mindful of needs and whether the need that pinches is real or not. For real needs, we must find provision. All other needs are optional, and increasing our income may be harder than simply cultivating insight into the nature of the need so we can eventually just let it go!
6. **Know when enough is enough.** It was once said that a person who needs \$100 and has only \$99 is "poor." But the person who needs \$100 and has \$101 is "rich." Cultivate the ability to recognize "riches" when you have them.



Entertainment

Since the introduction of radio in the early part of the 20th Century, entertainment in North America has moved progressively from something we did to amuse ourselves to something we consume which is produced by a few highly paid specialists. The net effect of this trend has been to produce some truly spectacular performers on the one hand, and an almost totally mute, motionless, and passive audience on the other. Entertainment, having become an “industry,” is now available mostly to those who can afford it. Voluntary simplicity joyfully proclaims the human need to celebrate! It also suggests that we de-junk anything that makes us passive consumers of staged celebrations and turn our attention instead to learning how to make our own noise.

1. **Discard, sell or donate all televisions and all radios except one.** Retaining one radio might be justifiable for news and emergency information.
2. **Donate all electronic “home entertainment” devices.** Glamorous images and fantastic production values, but finally most programs require that you sit still, be quiet, and pay your bill. Make your own entertainment by gathering family and friends to make your own music, poetry, stories, plays, and games.
3. **Be mindful of the costs and impacts of going to movies.** The motion picture industry is a huge consumer of resources, particularly energy used for travel and transportation. To view movies often requires special theatres or at least special home entertainment appliances that consume energy and are polluting to produce. While cinema can definitely be an art form and has its place in human cultures, most of what we see in movies are increasingly costly renditions of the same basic stories and plots few of which are uplifting of the human spirit. Movies are passive entertainment requiring nothing from viewers other than their ticket price. Finally, the time spent viewing movies made by professionals is time lost from developing our own artistic talents and story-telling skills.
4. **CDs & DVDs.** These can take up tons of space, yet music and movies are a culturally pleasing way to spend time. If you feel you must own these items, transfer disks and paper jackets to albums or cases designed to hold them and recycle the plastic cases. Now much music can be purchased on-line; by doing so you eliminate much of the packaging that accompanies these items.
5. **Discard all sports and athletic equipment not used within the last year.**



Housekeeping

There are many ways to de-junk our households, reduce waste, reduce clutter and reduce the replacement time (increase the life-cycle) of gadgets which are important to modern living in the 21st Century. For example, we probably don't really need electricity, but given that we may choose to use it, compact fluorescent lights reduce the amount of energy used, the life-cycle cost of supplying lighting, and only need to be replaced once every five years or so. Adding them simplifies our lives and conserves energy resources, although the investment cost may be high at first.

1. **Donate all hobby and craft supplies, kits, games, appliances, etc., not used within the last year.** If you haven't started refinishing that antique washstand, doing the oil painting of your favorite landscape, or used your exercise bike in the last year, pass them along to someone else who will. Lots of unused supplies for crafts and hobbies not only clutter up your quarters, they may deteriorate to a useless condition. Then they become waste.
2. **Install compact fluorescent light bulbs wherever practical.** These contribute to simplicity by conserving energy and hence, money, as well as having a longer service life than incandescent bulbs, thereby reducing the number of bulbs one must buy and the waste produced when their service life is spent. Use LED (light emitting diode) lights, they are even more conserving of electricity and longer lived than CFLs.
3. **Install water-conserving shower heads, sink aerators & toilet dams to reduce water consumption.** This contributes to simplicity by freeing up money from water bills for more worthwhile pursuits. Forty percent of the water used in an average North American household goes to flushing toilets. If it's time to replace that old toilet, consider a dual-flush/low volume replacement. This would contribute to the conservation of one of North America's most precious resources—fresh water.
4. **Donate all extra sheets and towels except one per family member (and possibly one extra for a guest).**
5. **Reduce knickknacks and extraneous clutter.**
6. **Reduce and simplify furnishings.** Reconsider purchasing furnishings simply to "fill rooms." Consider furniture designs that are simpler, lighter in construction, and made of

more natural, recyclable materials. Many indoor air quality problems arise from synthetic fabrics and foam fillers used in furnishings. If you have rooms that need “filling,” consider moving to smaller quarters.

7. **Donate all books you think you will never read again.** If we honestly appraise the merits of many books, we realize that we thought they would be good when we bought them, but they really have only a single-reading value. Why then encumber our life space with volumes we’ll never open again? Pass them on to someone who can’t afford them, or a hard-pressed public library where many people can benefit from them.



Photo Credit: Photographs by Sean Hogan

With a few flowers in my garden,
half a dozen pictures and some books,
I live without envy.

—Lope de Vega

8. **Donate all books you can otherwise borrow from a public library.** Reconsider whether you actually need to own a book to read and enjoy it. We can walk more lightly on the earth carrying a library card than lugging a library.
9. **Donate all books you haven't read within the last year.** Our interests change. There are relatively few books which remain relevant throughout our lives.
10. **Donate all books except your "soul mates."** If someone came to the door and told that you a flood or hurricane was coming and you must pack your belongings and leave, which books would you take? These are your "soul mates". The Roman philosopher Seneca once remarked: "All that really belongs to us is what we can carry away from a ship wreck."
11. **Terminate all subscriptions to magazines, book clubs, record clubs and "special memberships" you don't have time to read or do.** Consider eliminating all subscriptions and memberships which seemed like a good idea at the time but which in truth simply wind up accumulating in a pile in the corner. This reduces clutter and also reduces financial demands.
12. **Destroy all guns or other implements of violence or destruction.** Such objects have no place at all in a simple and peaceable way of life. They cannot even be donated without risk of harm and simply need to be recycled at the atomic level.
13. **Reduce and rationalize home care and cleaning products.** As your household becomes simpler and less cluttered and as the total number and diversity of your possessions trims down to a sleek minimum, you will notice far

less need for all sorts of other specialized, expensive and environmentally questionable products, e.g., oils, solvents, cleaners, polishes, chemicals used for appliances like dishwashers, etc. Save time, money and clutter by off-loading all this stuff, but remember, most of it will have to be taken to a hazardous waste depot!

14. **If you own a house, design landscaping to reduce yard care, maintenance and consumption of yard care products and tools, e.g., landscape your yard with local species requiring minimum care and watering.** The suburban yard is more demanding of energy, pesticides, fertilizers and water than any equivalent area of farm land. Moreover, many dangerous products are being applied by untrained people who would require special training, protective clothing, and licensing to apply the same chemicals to larger areas! Select a landscaping plan that uses native species, and reduce the need for water, herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers.

15. **Move to a smaller house.** Always an exceptionally good way to reduce and streamline our overall lifestyle.

16. **Sell your house (be mortgage free!) and move to a condo or apartment.** Look hard at why you own a house at all. Have your accommodation needs changed since you made the original decision to buy a house? Are you maintaining your house just so children have a familiar place to visit on holidays? Do you own a house because you think it's a good investment? Do the numbers again. Do you really like yard and household maintenance work? If so, fine. If not, consider some alternatives like condominiums, rental suites, housing co-operatives, co-housing facilities.

17. **Donate or recycle anything which isn't currently in daily use.** A "hard-core" recommendation, but it offers maximum freedom. Remember: space minus clutter adds tranquility and a calming atmosphere to your home.



Kitchen

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Kitchens can be “gadget magnets” just like garages and basements. As we simplify our diets, the need for specialized kitchen gadgets is correspondingly reduced. It may be appropriate, however, to add some items to the kitchen as we shift from consuming prepared and highly packaged “ready to eat” products to the preparation and preservation of our own produce. Usually, however, these additives can more than offset de-junking the electric knife, the waffle iron, the Wok, the Hibachi, the electric can opener, the wiener warmer, etc., etc.

1. **Donate all kitchen utensils not used within the last year.**
Same rationale here as the wardrobe recommendation. If you haven't prepared that fondue in the last twelve months, is it likely you will in the next twelve months?
2. **Donate or recycle all appliances designed only to prepare a single food, e.g., wiener warmers, popcorn poppers, waffle irons, fondue pots, etc.** Usually, all of these foods can be prepared quite adequately with fewer and more generic kitchen utensils. Does anyone need more than one good knife, for example?
3. **Reduce or donate all dishes, cutlery or specialized gadgets having only a decorative or single occasion significance, e.g., the snowman-shaped dish for Christmas cookies, the heart-shaped candy bowl for Valentine's Day, etc.** These gewgaws can sometimes help create a "holiday atmosphere," but they are so seldom in good taste or really attractive enough to warrant manufacturing them in the first place. Who produces all this junk, anyway? Consider using consumable or recyclable seasonal decorations.
4. **Use reusable shopping bags and reduce use of disposables.**
At one level, it might be argued that disposable products make life simpler by removing our need to think ahead and plan. It does take mindfulness to remember to bring along one's reusable shopping bags rather than just accepting the plastic ones supplied by the store and then throwing them away afterward. But voluntary simplicity is all about cultivating mindfulness, i.e., a wakeful attention to what is going on in the present moment. Disposables silently promote mindlessness by removing the need, at least in the short run, for us to consider the consequences of our actions. Save money and planetary resources by using reusable containers whenever possible. Just think of the drawer space that will become available when all those old plastic bags are gone!

5. **Donate all dishes except those needed to serve your family and regular guests.** If you often entertain lots of people, then you may need lots of dishes, and real dishes are environmentally more desirable than disposables. But if you entertain infrequently, consider simplifying your own kitchen by getting rid of the excess place settings. If you're planning on feeding a crowd, make it a pot-luck, or borrow some extra dishes from a neighbor for the occasion.
6. **Donate all dishes and related equipment except one bowl and one cup per person in your household.** This is a fairly monastic suggestion, but just think how clean it would keep the kitchen if everyone had to actually do their dishes before the next meal!
7. **Eliminate your dishwasher and all associated chemicals and products.** Assuming you adopt de-junking tip #6 above, would you then need a dishwasher, its associated chemicals, energy costs, repair and replacement worries?
8. **Consider changing how you cook.** This idea can meet with some resistance in families where preferences and customs are well-entrenched. But consider cooking more casseroles and soups—one pot meals that are nourishing but easier to prepare. Consider cooking ahead and freezing individual portions to cut down on the cooking and clean-up at other times during the week. Consider eating more

Making the simple complicated is commonplace;
making the complicated simple, awesomely simple,
that's creativity.

— Charles Mingus

raw foods that require no preparation at all except washing and cutting.

9. **The Trashless Lunch.** We can reduce waste and expense around lunches by purchasing reusable lunch kits with reusable food containers inside so we can enjoy lunch with zero trash left behind. Packing a lunch is also far less expensive than eating out.
10. **The humble thermos bottle.** Consider acquiring a thermos bottle for hot or cold drinks. Coffee (fair trade, of course!) made at home is far less expensive than that purchased from commercial vendors. If you have coffee at morning and afternoon coffee breaks and pay \$1.50 per serving, you will save \$750.00 per year just for coffee!



Self Care

The following suggestions aim to de-junk a little of what may clutter up our minds and hearts, our calendars and relationships, our souls and spirits.

- 1. Resign all committees, clubs, organizations or boards whose meetings you have missed three times in a row.** It may be a good committee working toward worthwhile goals, but you aren't going to the meetings! Something in your life is telling you that either this isn't really your priority, no matter how worthwhile the cause, or else it can't be your priority right now because your time is too full. So give it up, already!

2. **Say farewell to and then discard all artifacts associated with chapters of your life which are definitively closed.** Our lives are in continual motion. Everything is on its way somewhere else. Why keep those old love letters anyway?
3. **“Fast” from all media (including books) one day per week.** It probably is important to be an informed and active citizen in a democracy. But even being informed and active can have its day of rest.
4. **Discard all addictions to alcohol, non-prescription drugs, gambling, tobacco, caffeine sources, sugar, television, and prescription drugs, if possible.** Admittedly, this may not be easy to do, but addictions do clutter up our souls, our time, our bodies, and our lives.
5. **Reduce/Eliminate cosmetics.** Cosmetics, now available for both men and women, are costly and one of the primary pathways of direct exposure of the body to artificial chemicals which can affect health. Wear less or no make up. A great way to free up your bathroom counter and save money, a lot of money. Discover the glow of clean skin.
6. **Reduce use of perfumes or use just one, or better yet, stop.** Perfumes and colognes are costly as well as representing an allergy reaction risk for others. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the odor of clean skin.

I believe that a simple and unassuming
manner of life is best for everyone,
best both for the body and the mind.

— Albert Einstein



Sport

What is it about human beings that makes us think that nude swimming in outdoor lakes must morph into Olympic-size heated swimming pools open twelve months of the year? Why must we turn the pleasures of skating on frozen lakes and rivers into heated hockey arenas where we can skate in July, or building enclosed, artificially chilled ski hills in desert kingdoms like Dubai? All of these, and many other sporting activities have grown to the point where they represent major demands on energy, resources, and the household budget. Note also how in many cases, sport has simply become a commercial enterprise aimed at maximizing profit rather than developing the physical skills and character of participants. Consider some alternatives, for simplicity's sake!

1. **Pursue “low impact” sports.** Probably the lowest impact sport is skinny dipping—pleasurable, adventurous, erotic! Why not? It is clear, however, that there are large differences in expense and environmental impact between say canoeing or kayaking and yachting or power boating. Consider yoga, most martial arts, dancing, parkour (free running), capoeira (Brazilian dance-fighting), jogging, running, walking, and other activities that require little or no equipment. Compare the environmental impact and expense of a hike in the woods versus an all-terrain vehicle, or cross-country skiing versus alpine skiing that requires an entire mountain resort with chair-lifts, chalets and grooming machines. Why require a golf course for taking a walk?
2. **Re-think “mechanized sports”.** Is driving a car really a “sport”? Is taking an SUV up a mountainside really an encounter with nature? Is tearing around a lake on a personal watercraft, submarine, or powerboat really something that is likely to make you stronger, more fit, or healthier?
3. **Reconsider support for “professional sports”.** While much pleasure can be gained from watching truly gifted athletes perform their feats of strength, professional sport has become increasingly the domain of over-paid drug users competing for attention on rampantly exploitative media. Winning has come to matter more than promoting broad participation in activities that improve general health and help develop character. Consider alternatives to costly season tickets or subscriptions to specialty sports channels when money might otherwise be invested in one’s own family activities, coaching or participating in neighborhood teams—in short, getting off the couch to play instead of watching.
4. **Rediscover your public park.** Parks were once valued community assets which now in many places are barely used or have fallen into disrepair. Organize a baseball game, soccer game, tennis match, or other activity in the park nearest you. This also cements neighborhood relationships and strengthens community.



Transportation

Mobility is a basic human need. In general, we have met that need through transportation technologies of various kinds. In de-junking any aspect of our lives, it is always very helpful to keep the real need in mind—in this case, the need to get from place to place for various reasons—as we search for simple, direct ways of fulfilling the need. Mechanical transportation is the particular “solution” our present society offers to the human need for mobility. But this need has been provided for in many ways throughout history. As you think about satisfying your personal need for mobility, you may be surprised by the different choices that present themselves when you clearly state the need. We need mobility. Automakers want us to believe that every individual needs a personal car. There is a world of difference.

1. **Sell or donate your second (third or more) car(s).** Living without a car is one of the “50 Difficult Things You Can Do To Save The Earth.” Cars are expensive, noisy, dangerous and incredibly damaging to the environment. Unfortunately, we have engineered many communities so that life without cars is practically impossible. Nevertheless, we must guard against multiplying evils beyond necessity. If you can realistically reduce the number of cars you own, you will save oodles of money, increase your life expectancy and the Earth will thank you!
2. **Dispose of any specialized vehicles designed specifically to invade wilderness, e.g., all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, jet-skis, dune-buggies, swamp buggies, etc.** Specialized recreational vehicles can be “fun.” But they are often even more polluting and less safe than automobiles. Vehicles designed specifically to invade wilderness in effect extinguish wilderness by damaging habitats and stressing animals who need to be far away from human beings to thrive. Owning such vehicles adds to your possessions as well as adding to the headaches of maintaining them. Visiting the back country on foot is both environmentally more sustainable and simpler, and also a great way to experience more by moving slower. As good stewards of creation, we need to find other ways to experience our “power rushes.”
3. **Carpool or use public transit.** It has been estimated that there are so many passenger vehicles in North America that our entire population could be in cars at the same time and no one would have to sit in the back seat! Yet cars are second only to passenger jets for the prize for least efficient form of transportation. For every passenger we add to a car by carpooling, we reduce the number of cars on the road by that many. Public transit systems are even more efficient and less costly than personal automobiles. If you live in a place where public transit is a real option for you, you can simplify your life by using it.

4. **Join (or start) a car-sharing cooperative.** Why own your own car if you don't need one 24/7? Car-sharing coops are popping up all over North America. Coop members buy a small fleet of vehicles which are then used on a time-share basis. You pay for the car only when you use it. Moreover, coops can own a number of different vehicle types, thus enabling members to have access to cars, trucks, minivans and even trailers which they could never hope to own as individuals. Do the math: Car coop membership can cut your personal cost of transportation by more than half.

5. **Use bus or rail to travel long distances rather than fly.** As North Americans have invested more and more money in their highway systems, we have seen a corresponding deterioration of rail services and other forms of mass transit. But trains move more people greater distances with the lowest environmental impact except for bicycles. Flying by passenger jet is the



Photo Credit: Photographs by Sean Hogan

Simplicity is making the journey of this life with just baggage enough.

- Charles Dudley Warner

least efficient method of transport ever invented by humans with the exception of the space shuttle. If you can arrange appropriate connections by rail, try going by train the next time you take a trip. It's a different experience from air travel, can be less expensive, and far more comfortable. Moreover, in today's world, security delays and other time wasters in airports can often eat up the time saving achieved by flying, especially for short trips.

6. **Use a bicycle.** For practitioners of voluntary simplicity, the bicycle is the vehicle of choice. These little machines are the most efficient form of transportation ever invented. They are entirely human-powered, generally low in cost, cause virtually no pollution, can take you nearly anywhere on road or off, and provide excellent health benefits to cyclists. They are also inexpensive to maintain, and always start.
7. **Walk.** Walking is, of course, the ultimate in simplicity. Walking is silent, healthy, non-polluting, and slow enough to allow us maximum opportunities to enjoy all of the sensory richness of the areas we walk through. Walking costs nothing and it can be an important form of meditation. It is also thought that walking helps to "balance" and calm the nervous system as well as oxygenating the blood and stimulating the imagination because we use both hemispheres of our brain to coordinate walking movements.
8. **Travel/Souvenirs:** Vacations tend to add quite a bit of clutter to our lives as we jam pack our suitcases to bring home what we think are valuable souvenirs of our holiday...Often we are buying these items in an attempt to take back some of the feelings and experiences we had. Instead of another t-shirt or knick-knack depicting your vacation destination, write in a journal and take photos to remind you of your time. Pick up free or natural tokens of your experience or practical items you are sure you will use when you get home.



To find the universal elements enough;
to find the air and the water exhilarating;
to be refreshed by a morning walk
or an evening saunter ...
to be thrilled by the stars at night;
to be elated over a bird's nest or a
wildflower in spring—these are some of the
rewards of the simple life.

— John Burroughs

Do-Do's

In voluntary simplicity workshops, we sometimes include an exercise where participants imagine they are on a tropical island which provides all their basic needs (food, water, shelter, safety, etc.) but they have no other material possessions. The goal of the exercise is to have group members devise as many things as they can think of which they can do together and alone but without rebuilding material culture. The list which usually emerges resembles the one below. It is mostly a list of intrinsic human powers—things people can do and enjoy and practice without tools or special equipment—or very little of it.

In a broader sense, the list is an answer to two key questions which people often ask of voluntary simplicity:

First, if I discard most of my stuff, what on Earth would I do? The “DO DO” list is a list of suggestions for what you can do with very little.

Second, the list partly answers the question, “What do people who have embraced simpler living do with all that time?” In essence, the “DO DO” list is a prescription for environmentally sustainable living. Many people could practice what is listed below, create much beauty, much joy, much strong family and community feeling, and damage the planet very little. We recommend the “DO DO” list as a starting place to mine the riches of simplicity. It is certainly not complete and we hope it will always remain under construction.

1. DO acquire a musical instrument and learn to play it.
2. DO cultivate an interest in “low consumption” sports (e.g., martial arts, outdoor swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing, etc.).

3. **DO** learn as many dances as you can.
4. **DO** learn to sing as many songs as you can remember.
5. **DO** learn a second (or third) language.
6. **DO** learn to compose and tell stories.
7. **DO** learn to be an accomplished public speaker.
8. **DO** learn pantomime and drama.
9. **DO** memorize the contents of sage wisdom books from your spiritual tradition.
10. **DO** learn meditation.
11. **DO** learn to grow your own food organically.
12. **DO** learn to give a massage.
13. **DO** become a vegetarian.
14. **DO** donate, trade or recycle at least one thing for every new thing you acquire.
15. **DO** provide for “trial separations” from things you aren’t sure are really junk by boxing them up and putting them away for six months. If you don’t go looking for them during that time, chances are they play no important role in your life.
16. **DO** learn to observe and appreciate nature.
17. **DO** volunteer your time, talents and energy to helping others in some way.
18. **DO** walk, hike, run, sit and be fully awake to where you are.
19. **DO** pray if your belief so inclines you.
20. **DO** listen to the stories of others.
21. **DO** read the poetry of your enemies.

Resources

Resources on clutter-busting are fairly common. Not all of the titles listed below will be books in print. You may have success finding them in public libraries or from used book sellers on line. Some may have appeared in later editions in which case you can find them by contacting your favorite bookstore.

Berthold-Bond, Annie (1999). Better Basics for the Home: Simple Solutions for Less Toxic Living. New York: Three Rivers Press. Promotes the environmental and health benefits of a less toxic lifestyle. Offers more than 800 simple and practical alternatives to common household toxins, covering everything from skin care to gardening.

Campbell, Jeff (1992). Clutter Control: Putting Your Home on a Diet. New York: Dell Publishing. Discusses both the physical and psychological aspects of managing material possessions. Suggests ways to minimize the negative impact of too much clutter.

Cox, Connie & Evatt, Cris (1998). 30 Days to a Simpler Life. New York: The Penguin Group. Practical guide for organizing living spaces, including offices, wardrobes, photos, books and magazines. Travel, financial planning, and leisure are also covered.

Culp, Stephanie (1991). Streamlining Your Life: A 5-Point Plan for Uncomplicated Living. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books. This book has many tips about organizing our lives through reducing clutter and focusing on clear goals. It doesn't advocate voluntary simplicity so much as personal efficiency in applying effort. Nonetheless, for some people, the suggestions in this book may prove valuable.

Dacyczn, Amy (1999). The Complete Tightwad Gazette: Promoting Thrift as a Viable Alternative Lifestyle. New York: Random House. Consolidates material from the author's former newsletter and books. Includes detailed, practical, and thoroughly researched ideas for ways to live frugally.

Dappen, Andy (1997). Shattering the Two-Income Myth: Daily Secrets for Living Well on One Income. Mountlake Terrace, WA: Brier Books. Thoughtful summary of why and how we evolved into a two-income society, as well as practical advice on how to live on one income.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon (1994). Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness, Meditation... If you have only one book on meditation practice, this should be it. Kabat-Zinn introduces mindfulness meditation in very clear, contemporary language, along with a variety of meditation exercises to help deepen practice and open new capacities of awareness. Simple, practical, accessible.

Lippe, Toinette (2002). Nothing Left Over: A Plain and Simple Life. New York: J. P. Tarcher. Memoir by spirituality editor and former publisher about living mindfully without attachment to material possessions, focusing instead on the richness of experiences. Includes references to both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

Long, Charles (1996). How to Survive Without a Salary: Learning to Live the Conserver Lifestyle. Toronto: Warwick Publishing. Discusses the "conserver" lifestyle – reducing expenses, saving, and earning casual income. Promotes value of earning casual income rather than work in a salaried job.

Robinson, Jo and Staeheli, Jean Coppock (1991). Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season. New York: Quill. Explores how to create a more meaningful holiday, focusing on deeply satisfying spiritual and family experiences rather than excessive materialism.





You have succeeded in life
when all you really want
is only what you really need.

—Vernon Howard



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info@simplicitycentre.org

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