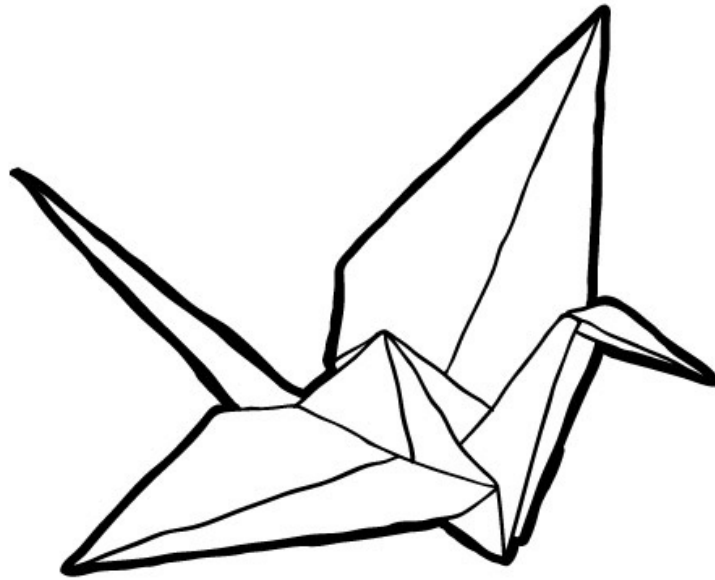


# The 2015 Simple Living Handbook

Phase 1 - For those of us just beginning the simple living journey



-- Are you ready to let go? --

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2015 Simple Living Handbook.

I'm so happy to have you here and can't wait to show you the basics, benefits and beauty of slowing down and living a simpler life. 2015 is your year to simplify.

The following pages are designed to help you simplify, slow down and reconnect with the important parts of life and to do so in a realistic, measured way.

Anyone can go on a decluttering binge and purge a whole lot of stuff. And for some people that approach works beautifully. But when you have kids, a house, work, parents to care for, pets, hobbies, friends and other responsibilities, it can be far too overwhelming to try and tackle large areas of your home all at once.

In fact, many of us here have tried that approach and are still looking at piles of clutter that clog our homes. For us, the gung-ho approach hasn't worked.

But this handbook, and the philosophy behind [Slow Your Home](#), is that of small and regular steps. It's about mindfulness and changing our relationship with stuff completely.

Sure, the first steps of simplifying really are all about stuff - sorting it, decluttering it and deciding how much of it we really want - but the subsequent steps are not about stuff at all. Instead they're about life.

This is why these handbooks take a measured, slower approach to simplifying. I don't want you to suffer setbacks or overwhelm. I want you to be able to move through your home space by space, room by room, step by step, and arrive at the destination of a home that works for you. I want you to get to that place as easily as possible and I want you to feel, at every step of the way, that it's doable.

This is the first time I've split the Simple Living Handbook (previously known as the 2014 in 2014 Annual Declutter Challenge) into two separate resources. Last year I had over 4,500 people join and complete the challenge, many of whom decluttered tens of thousands of items from their homes. As 2014 drew to a close, I had many requests for a 2015 challenge that would help participants extend their efforts to simplify life.

I didn't want to simply provide the same challenge again, but I also didn't want to ignore new participants and their need to start at the beginning. So, the 2015 Simple Living Handbook - Stages 1 and 2 - were born.

You are reading Stage One of the Handbook, which has been designed for those of us just beginning the journey into slower, simpler living.

If you're:

- overwhelmed
- tired of the clutter
- sick of the anxiety

- unsure where to start
- confused how to start

then Stage One is for you.

Stage Two of the Simple Living Handbook takes things a step further and is best suited to those who already have a very good handle on the 'stuff' side of simplifying or for those who have been actively decluttering for some time and feel ready to start focusing on other areas of home and life. In Stage Two we look at ways to simplify our:

- home - daily and weekly rhythms, simple organisational tips, creating a Slow Home
- head - mindfulness, intentional living, avoiding comparisons, social media
- health - clean eating, meal planning, simple daily exercise

You can [grab a copy of the Stage Two Handbook here](#).

The Stage One Handbook is similar in both design and content to the 2014 in 2014 Annual Declutter Challenge guidebook, and it is very much a step-by-step guide into the first stages of creating a simpler, slower life. This guidebook, in all its iterations, has served thousands of people very well over the past 3 years and I didn't want to mess with the format.

There are, however, additions and improvements throughout. So if you've previously started or even completed the 2014 guidebook but don't feel ready to start on Stage Two just yet (you may have more clutter to deal with, new circumstances, or more time to spend on the project this year) then it will be worthwhile for you to read on and start fresh with the Stage One Handbook.

Also, if you're in doubt as to which book you need, I suggest starting with Stage One and ensuring you have the basics of simplifying on lockdown. Because, if there's one thing I've learnt over the past 4 years of simple living, it's that the entire process is anything but simple.

Before we get any further, let me ask you this:

What do you dream of for 2015?

- Less stress?
- Less clutter?
- Less overwhelm?
- More time?
- More space?
- More contentment?

I asked myself the same question three years ago and decided I wanted to create a home that was calm, light, airy and full of great memories for my family and friends. A home that would allow me to live the life I dreamed of.

I wanted a clutter-free home that was easy to live in, easy to keep clean and easy to keep organised. I wanted a home that worked for us, rather than a home we worked constantly to keep up with.

Unfortunately I was nowhere near that becoming a reality. Over time, my family of four had collected a house full of stuff and looking around, I knew it was stuff we didn't need. Most of it was stuff we didn't even want. But where to begin? I felt overwhelmed and stuck.

I needed a challenge to kick me into action.

That's when I started the 2012 in 2012 Declutter Challenge on my blog. I ran the challenge by myself, for myself, simply to see if I could do it. I wanted some measure of accountability, so I posted regular updates on my blog as I began the challenge of decluttering 2012 items in one year.

That's approximately 5.5 items a day.

And by the end of the year I had cleared out well over 2,000 items. In fact the final total was closer to 15,000 items.

At the end of 2012 our home had started to represent the kind of life we were trying to build. There was space and time for good conversations, opportunity for rest and relaxation, and so many fun times.

But it wasn't quite there, so I embarked on another annual declutter challenge. But this time I invited blog readers along for the ride. And the results were astounding. There were readers who decluttered tens of thousands of items from their homes, while others found the numbers less important than the positive impact the process of simplifying had on their life.

In our home, we decluttered another 3000+ items and finally arrived at a point of maintenance rather than active decluttering. Finally, our home resembled what we were aiming for - somewhere we could slow down and enjoy the important things (which turned out to not be things at all).

As 2013 drew to a close, I had many emails from people asking about 2014. I knew I wanted to continue the challenge after seeing such huge changes in so many lives, but I wanted to do something different, so I created the month-by-month guidebook of 2014.

I created a [Facebook group](#) for those of us working through the program and was astounded to find the group at 4,500 members by the end of 2014. Many of them worked through the entire guidebook, while others simply tackled the areas that required attention. To be completely truthful, I was shocked at the impact the book and the Facebook community had on so many lives.

Which brings us to 2015.

I'm excited to see how this new approach continues to help and change lives, and I can't wait to dive in to 2015 with you!

## How Does Stage One Work?

Stage One is a month-by-month handbook. Each chapter outlines the tasks for the coming month, as well as tips and advice on how best to tackle those tasks. You will also find links to additional resources on many of the topics, in case you need additional inspiration.

The biggest change I have made from previous years is that there is no longer a defined number of items to declutter. There is room in each checklist for you to add your own item-goal (and I encourage you to do just that) but everyone's circumstances and starting point is different and the last thing I want is for people to feel discouraged because they weren't reaching an arbitrary number of items decluttered. So if you want to work towards a particular figure, set yourself a realistic yet challenging item-goal and be sure to keep yourself accountable.

To get started, simply print out the handbook and dive in. It doesn't matter what time of year you discover the guide or what time of year you start. Simply begin at the beginning and work through the chapters as you can.

Also, don't forget to join us in the [Facebook group](#). It's open to anyone, and you can simply [click here](#) to request membership. (It may take a few hours for your approval to come through if I happen to be sleeping!)

The aim of the group is both support and encouragement, as well as public accountability. I was far more inclined to push myself when I knew I had to report my goals and results at the end of every month, and I invite anyone who would like to share their progress on the page to do just that.

If you're not comfortable with that level of sharing (totally understandable!) please pop in and say hello anyway. There's over 6,500 of us there discussing the current tasks and challenges we're facing as we work towards creating a simpler home.

The aim here is simply to challenge yourself to question what you do and don't need in your home. And the ultimate goal is to create a space that is clutter-free, comfortable and good for you.

So with that, let's dive in with to first step - a 15-minute survey.

# CLUTTER QUESTIONNAIRE -- Month #1

These questions are designed to give you a realistic overview of your current clutter situation. There's no right or wrong answer and no good or bad place to begin. It's simply important to understand your home, the hotspots and your own strengths and weaknesses before you begin.

I often find that simply being aware of these things helps me to overcome the obstacles more easily too. Not only am I aware of them before starting, but I can also ensure I'm operating at my best when dealing with a task that is going to prove difficult. Even if that means putting something off until I have the time to do it properly, the results are always worth it.

You will need approximately 15-20 minutes to complete this survey. Not only will it help you identify sore points, hotspots, strengths and weaknesses, but it also gives you a baseline to measure your progress against. We will revisit the questionnaire later in the year, and finish up with a final survey to see just how far you've come in 12 months.

Print off the survey and take some time to think through your answers. It will also help you to walk through each room as needed and evaluate the current situation.

## SECTION 1 - Your Home

1. Do you live in a:

- house
- apartment
- townhouse
- flat
- duplex
- trailer
- other

2. How many bedrooms do you have?

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3. How many levels ?

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4. How many rooms in your home in total?

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5. How many cupboards/closets or wardrobes?

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6. How many storage rooms? (Including linen cupboard, basement, attic, etc.)

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7. How many outbuildings? (Including sheds, garages, studios, etc.)

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8. Do you rent any extra storage space outside your home?

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## SECTION 2 - Your Clutter

On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being sparse and 10 being hoarder-type clutter) rate the current clutter situation for each of the following applicable rooms:

Entryway	1	-----	5	-----	10
Kitchen	1	-----	5	-----	10
Dining	1	-----	5	-----	10
Living	1	-----	5	-----	10
TV Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Playroom	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallway 1	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallyway 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallway 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Office/Study	1	-----	5	-----	10
Master Bedroom	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 4	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 5	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 6	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Guest Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Laundry Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Ensuite	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bathroom 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bathroom 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Powder Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Linen cupboard	1	-----	5	-----	10
Store Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Basement	1	-----	5	-----	10
Attic	1	-----	5	-----	10
Front Patio	1	-----	5	-----	10
Back Patio	1	-----	5	-----	10
Garage	1	-----	5	-----	10
Garden Shed	1	-----	5	-----	10
External studio	1	-----	5	-----	10

## SECTION 3: You, Your Housemates and their Habits

1. Who do you live with?

- Housemates/Friends
- Partner
- Kids
- Grandkids
- Carer
- Parents
- In-Laws
- Other

2. What are their ages?

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3. Are they messy? Tidy? Helpful? Enthusiastic?

Note down a little about each of the people you live with.

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4. Are you currently studying?

YES / NO

5. Is anyone else in the home studying?

YES / NO

6. Are there a lot of materials (books, papers, supplies) involved in this study?

YES / NO

7. Do you have space to keep it?

YES / NO

8. What do you do for work?

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9. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

10. What do your housemates do for work?

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11. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

12. Is there space to store it?

YES / NO

13. Do you participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

14. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

15. Does anyone else participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

16. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

17. Is there space to store this currently?

YES / NO

18. Do you live with kids?  
What are their ages?

YES / NO

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19. Are they likely to be helpful in the decluttering process? YES / NO

20. On a scale of one to ten (with 1 being very few and 10 being an overwhelming amount) how many toys do your kids own?

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

21. Is there enough room to store them? YES / NO  
22. Is your partner open to the idea of decluttering? YES / NO  
23. Is your partner/spouse a sentimental person? YES / NO  
24. Are you are a sentimental person? YES / NO  
25. Do you find it difficult to let go of mementoes? YES / NO

26. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being very happy and 10 being very unhappy) rate how you feel about the current clutter situation in your home.

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

27. List the top 5 areas of clutter in your home you are most concerned about.

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28. If you could choose one word to describe how you hope to feel in your home once this handbook is completed, what would it be? (Think positive - content, calm, happy, relaxed, etc.)

**Once you've completed the survey, file it away somewhere you will remember, so you can compare circumstances when we revisit the same questions in a few months. The aim is to recycle all three 2015 surveys once the 12 months are up and you have reached your decluttering goal.**

# JANUARY: Baby Steps

Welcome to the first month of 2015!

Being January, everyone is super keen to get their simpler lives underway – I get this. In fact, I'm often gripped with a demented need to start afresh every New Year.

But because I'm all about approaching simplicity in a slow, sustainable, realistic way, January is going to be devoted to taking baby steps. I think people often dive in to decluttering in a gung-ho, adhoc way.

For example:

*You decide to declutter and spend the weekend ripping into every room, determined to clear out the crap. Then, about halfway through, while the contents of every drawer, cupboard and wardrobe are littered across the floor, you run out of steam. You stop making good decisions about what you no longer need, and eventually give up and shove whatever is left back in the cupboard, leaving it more of a mess than it was before.*

(If you're thinking this sounds familiar, don't worry, I'm with you. I did this exact thing more times than I care to count...)

**This is why January is about baby steps. Establishing a slower, simpler rhythm to your decluttering means you are far more likely to keep it up as the year progresses.**

If you need a refresher on the best technique to use when decluttering, read on. Otherwise, simply move ahead to the task list for January.

# Your Never-Fail Decluttering Technique

Here is my tried and tested technique for how to best declutter. You can use it when working on any space and it will never lead you astray:

**1. Decide on a single surface to declutter.** Once you begin, do not move on to another until this one is completely clutter-free and (preferably) well organised.

**2. Establish an area as your work space.** You need a clear, flat work surface for sorting and organising.

**3. Grab four boxes or bags.**

**Donate Box:** for anything in good condition that can be donated to charity, given as hand-me-downs to friends or family, or given away using Freecycle, TuShare or other similar services.

**Throw Away Box:** anything not in good, useable condition.

**Recycle Box:** items that can be recycled (typically papers, cardboard, some plastics, tin, etc).

**Holding Box (optional):** keep any items you're unsure about. Put these items in storage for six months and then decide (based on whether you missed or needed the items) if you will keep or donate the contents.

**4. Remove everything from the space you are decluttering.** Take everything out of the drawer/shelf/cupboard you are working on and place it all on your newly cleared work surface, leaving the space completely empty. Clean it with a damp cloth. I like to use diluted white vinegar in a spray bottle, as it helps remove mustiness.

**5. Pick up each item individually and decide if you will keep it.** If you're unsure, ask yourself these questions:

Do I need this?

Do I want this?

Do I use this? (Or have I used it in the past year?)

Do I love this?

Is it beautiful?

Is it meaningful?

The amount of time you spend on the decision will depend on what it is and how much it has meant to you in the past. (Decluttering the fridge will take less intense scrutiny than decluttering a box filled with keepsakes from your childhood, for example.)

**6. Work through each item.** Place it in the appropriate box, or back on the now-decluttered surface.

**7. Box up the items** for donation and recycle/throw away the things you can't give away.

**8. Marvel at the beautiful clutter-free surface you've just created.**

Once you've found your decluttering groove, this method will become second-nature and you'll be able to tweak things so they work better for you. But while you're in the early stages of simplifying, starting small and following these steps means you're less likely to get overwhelmed.

## **This month we're tackling:**

- kitchen drawers
- medicine cabinet
- purse/handbag
- car
- entryway

Move through these areas of your home as you have the time. Each project shouldn't take longer than 30-45 minutes (with some significantly less than that).

You will be looking for things you no longer need, want or use. But on top of that, these small areas will also offer up a lot of rubbish. It truly is amazing the stuff we accumulate and these hotspots are magnets for junk collection!

If you need additional help, guidance or advice on any of these areas, the following posts may be helpful:

[Quick Declutter of the Kitchen Drawers](#)

[Creating a Slow Entryway](#)

[8 Ways to Create an Effective Entryway](#)

[Pinterest Board: Slow Entry and Landing Strips](#)

Or, visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share your problem with the hundreds of members. Chances are, many of us have similar frustrations or possible solutions.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keeping them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The JANUARY Checklist

Kitchen Drawers

- Cutlery
- Utensils
- Tupperware and/or plastics
- Junk drawer
- Other
- Other

Medicine Cabinet

Purse/Handbag

Car

- Floor
- Boot/trunk
- Glove compartment
- Pockets

Entryway

- Coat rack
- Hall stand
- Hall closet
- Shoe basket
- Drop zone for keys, sunglasses etc
- Mail

**Total Items Decluttered:** \_\_\_\_\_

# FEBRUARY: Utility Spaces

After a stellar introductory month, it's time to get a little more serious as we dive into the second month of the year and the Simple Living Handbook.

February is all about the utility spaces in our homes, which often become dumping grounds for all kinds of clutter, rubbish, 'too-hard' items and things we will 'get around to soon'.

This month we need to set aside anywhere upwards of 3 hours to complete the tasks outlined below. It may be significantly more if you have multiple bathrooms, or if the laundry has not had a serious declutter in some time.

This is why the tasks have been broken down into much smaller jobs, meaning you can spend 15 minutes on a small task if you don't have time to tackle an entire room. It also means you get the benefit of little victories more often, which will drive and motivate you to keep going.

Side Note: Around this time of the year we begin to slip back into regular mode, after the excitement and resolutions of the New Year. This is a welcome respite in one way - it's truly lovely to get back into the rhythm of life - but it can also mean we slip back into old clutter habits. Try and pep yourself up a little as you work:

- listen to some happy music
- dance
- keep tracking your decluttering efforts
- reward yourself with a treat, a coffee or a wine when you complete a particularly tricky task on the checklist

But mostly just keep an eye on how you deal with the incoming stuff, as well as the outgoing items.

This means you should also:

- ensure you deal with mail as it comes in
- perform a quick clutter bust once a week to keep on top of all the incidental clutter that happens during the day
- make an effort to tidy up the kitchen, living and dining rooms before you go to bed each night

These three changes will have a huge impact on your home, and, more importantly, the way you feel.



## **This month we're working through the following spaces:**

- bathroom
- ensuite
- guest bathroom
- powder room
- laundry room
- utility room/broom cupboard

Move through these areas of your home as you have the time.

The smaller tasks (out of date lotions, make-up etc) won't take longer than 15 minutes, but some of the others will see you spending 30-45 minutes on them.

It's important to keep an eye out for things you no longer need, want or use. But on top of that you need to keep only toiletries and cosmetics that are still within the use-by-date.

Visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share any problems you may be having. Chances are, many of us have similar frustrations or possible solutions.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The FEBRUARY Checklist

Bathroom     Ensuite     Guest Bathroom

- Cabinet
- Drawers
- Cosmetics
- Candles/gift packs
- Bath toys
- Lotions, creams etc
- Out-of-date items
- Decor
- Benchtop

Powder Room

- Decor
- Cabinet
- Benchtop

Laundry Room

- Cleaning supplies
- Mismatched socks etc
- Clothes waiting for 'repair'
- Secondary storage
- Dirty clothes hamper
- Cleaning cupboard

Utility Room     Broom Cupboard

- Shelves
- Floor
- Gadget

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

# MARCH: Paper Clutter

One of the most common obstacles people have when it comes to decluttering their home is paper clutter.

Not only mail, but statements, receipts, notes from school, to-do lists, phone numbers, business cards, account information, legal papers... It is endless.

But this month we are throwing ourselves into resolving the paper clutter issue, once and for all!

Before we head into the meat and potatoes of this month's task list, I'd love you to take 15 minutes and read my [Ultimate Guide to Removing Paper Clutter](#) ([Part One](#), [Part Two](#) and [Part Three](#)).

The guide takes you through all the different types and sources of paper clutter, as well as the tried and tested technique that I have used when removing paper clutter from my home.

So take a moment to read through those posts and come back to me, ready to rip in...

Go on.

Honestly, it's OK. I'll wait....

Great! It was worth it, right?

Paper clutter strikes fear into the heart of many. But if you take it step-by-step, as outlined in the Ultimate Guide, you will be hundreds, if not thousands of items lighter by the end of the month.

Even if you don't struggle too much with papers taking over the office, kitchen or bedrooms, you may still need to nominate a night (or two or three) to work through it.

And while our regular decluttering process (as outlined in the January chapter of this handbook) still applies when we are decluttering paperwork and administrative stuff, you will need to ask yourself some additional questions as you work through it:

- Do I need this (for legal or business reasons?)
- If not, why am I holding on to it?
- Can I access and store this information online instead?

By keeping these questions in mind as you go, you will be able to let go of so much more clutter this month, and you won't believe the difference that will make to your home and/or business management.

### **This month we're working through the following spaces:**

As always, not every one of these areas will apply to you. Simply work through the ones that do:

- office
- study
- study nook
- papers in the kitchen
- papers in the bedroom
- papers in storage

Move through these areas of your home as you have the time.

Unlike most tasks in the Challenge, paper clutter requires a little more time than we often have. So it would be best if you could assign at least one full hour to each of the tasks, or set aside a weekend to work through all the paper clutter at once. Either way, just work through the process step-by-step and try not to get overwhelmed!

If you need a little encouragement (or commiseration!) pop in and visit the private [Facebook Group](#). We're a friendly bunch and would love to help, or perhaps lend a virtual shoulder to cry on!

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The MARCH Checklist

- Office       Study       Study Nook
- Filing cabinet
- Drawers
- Desk (surface)
- Desk (drawers)
- Desk (cupboards)
- Shelves
  
- Papers (Kitchen)       Papers (Bedroom)       Papers (Storage)
- Old bills, tax information etc
- Mail
- Magazines
- Papers requiring action
- Papers waiting to be filed
- School papers
- Catalogues
- Work papers

**Total Items Decluttered:** \_\_\_\_\_

# APRIL: Bedrooms

Month 4 is upon us and once we're done here, you will be 30% of the way through the handbook and much closer to reaching your simplifying goals for 2015.

This month is all about the bedrooms.

Bedrooms are supposed to be a haven for resting, loving, relaxing and sleeping, yet so many of us have rooms crammed with technology, clothes, furniture, knick-knacks, books and random stuff that it is far from the restful place it should be.

So if you're ready to create a clutter-free, airy space to sleep in (for both you and your family) then let's dive in.

**NOTE: This month, while we are tackling the bedrooms, we won't be diving into the wardrobes. They are often a huge challenge for people, and deserve a month all of their own.**

The length of this month's challenge is dependent on how many bedrooms your home has, how many people live with you, whether you have children, room-mates, parents or frequent guests.

Regardless of whether your home is a 6-bedroom mansion or a studio apartment, you owe it to yourself and those you live with to create bedrooms that encourage good rest.

Move through the bedrooms one by one, working through each of the areas listed below. Some won't apply to you, while others will be challenging.

Use the decluttering guidelines outlined in the January chapter of this handbook to work through each area.

The amount of time you spend in each room will vary, depending on the size and current state of it. And while it is undoubtedly a big undertaking, this is one of the most important rooms to work through. Get it right and you could improve your sleep, your love life and your overall well-being.

Sounds pretty good, right?

**This month we're working through the following spaces:**

- master bedroom
- kids bedroom 1
- kids bedroom 2
- kids bedroom 3
- kids bedroom 4
- guest bedroom

As always, not every one of these areas will apply to you. Simply work through the ones that do.

You can expect to spend 2-4 hours on each room, with the checklist broken down into easily manageable tasks. Work through these areas of your home as you have the time, and don't be afraid to break the tasks down into very small 10-minute mini-tasks.

For added inspiration, take a moment to look through the following resources. These will help you create not only a clutter-free space, but also one that works for you, your partner, you housemates and your kids.

[Slow Bedroom Pinterest board](#)

[Creating a Simple Bedroom](#)

[Simple Living in Real Life: The Family with Teenagers](#)

[5 Steps to Creating a Slow Bedroom](#)

Visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share any problems you may be having. Chances are, many of us have similar frustrations or possible solutions.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The APRIL Checklist

Master Bedroom

- Bedside tables
- Bed - excess pillows, linen etc
- Walls - excess/ugly prints
- Top of drawers
- Under the bed
- Frames, lamps, excess furniture
- Technology - consider removing TV, laptop etc

- Bedroom 1       Bedroom 2       Bedroom 3  
 Bedroom 4       Bedroom 5       Bedroom 6

- Bedside table
- Desk - books, papers, general clutter
- Bed - stuffed toys, linen, pillows
- Under the bed - rubbish, toys
- Shelves - knick-knacks, photo frames
- Decor - wall hangings
- Technology - computer, TV, gaming

Guest Bedroom

- Bedside table
- Under the bed
- Storage/Wardrobe - remove junk and general clutter
- Decor - linen, pillows, wall hangings

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_



## MAY: Wardrobes

This is the month of wardrobes, shoes and accessories, and it is potentially a goldmine for items to add to your yearly total.

Aside from that, for many, wardrobes are inextricably tied with emotion - changes we move through as we grow older and perhaps have kids, fluctuating waistlines, failures and wins, periods of happiness or sadness, health or illness - the clothes we wear can conjure up all sorts of deep-rooted feelings.

Unlike most other months, this big decluttering project really needs its own approach, so below you will find a more in-depth look at tackling each of the wardrobes in your home.

The amount of time you need to set aside for this month's challenge depends on:

- your current wardrobe situation – is it stuffed to the brim with clothes, or is it manageable?
- your current circumstances – do you have lots of different clothing needs (officewear, exercise gear, weekend wear) or do you wear similar clothes most days?
- the number of kids you have, if any
- whether you will be tackling your partner's wardrobe too (hint: let them see your efforts pay off first, then they may be inspired into action themselves.)
- your goals – do you want a minimalist capsule wardrobe, or are you simply looking to clear out the items that are no longer worn?

As a ballpark figure though, I suggest you put aside 3-5 hours for your wardrobe (easily broken up into smaller chunks), plus an extra 2-4 hours for your kids.

NOTE: If your kids are older - teenagers or beyond - feel free to print this list off and give it to them. There's no reason you should be left to do this task alone! (Then they can harbour any ill-will towards me, instead of you!)

## Your Wardrobe Decluttering Technique

There are two ways to go about decluttering your wardrobe, depending on the time you have on hand and the space within which you can work.

Before you do anything though, grab yourself three plastic bags or boxes. One is for donations, another for throwing away (items that aren't in a condition to be donated or cannot be repaired) and the third is for storage (items you aren't sure about).

Once you've got those in place, you can either:

**Work your way through each section of the wardrobe** one by one (choose one shelf, one drawer, one hanging rail to begin with) and not moving on until the current section is complete and any items you are keeping are put back in place –

OR

**Clear your bed** and dump the entire contents of your wardrobe there, working through the pile piece by piece.

1. Either way, commit to not putting anything back into your wardrobe until you have asked yourself the following questions:

- Have I worn this in the last year? No? Then let it go.
- Is it in good condition? If not, do I love it enough to have it repaired? No? Let it go.
- Do I feel good wearing this? This is a big one – it doesn't matter how beautiful it is, unless you feel good wearing it, it will languish in the back of your wardrobe, taunting you. Let it go.
- Does it fit me well? Again, it doesn't matter how gorgeous it is or how much it cost, if it doesn't fit well, then you won't wear it. Let it go.
- Is there a good reason to keep it? If it is in incredibly good condition, is very well made, and is a classic style (think well-cut blazer, little black dress, black pumps) then you may want to keep it. But unless it is all of those things, then let it go.

2. Don't put the item down until you have decided where it goes. If you decide to keep it, then return it to the correct spot in your wardrobe, otherwise put it in your donate or throw away bag.

3. If you're really torn, you can add things to the third box. Put the box away for six months (put a reminder on your phone or in your diary) and if there's nothing you need/want in it over that time, you can safely donate everything in there, without opening it.

4. Once you've finished going through your clothes, accessories and shoes, you can quickly look over your "keep it...for now" pile and weed out anything you've kept in a weak moment. I find that once I'm in the zone, decisions come much more easily.

5. Marvel at the feeling of an orderly wardrobe full of clothes you like to wear!

This is undoubtedly a huge undertaking for some of us. If you're feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of opening the wardrobe, let alone trying to work through the contents, the following resources may prove helpful or inspirational:

[Project 333 by Courtney Carver](#) - an experiment in living with only 33 items of clothing for 3 months at a time.

[Declutter - Tackling Your Wardrobes](#)

[Keeping Sane While Your Kids Trash Their Wardrobe - Again](#)

Visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share any problems you may be having. Chances are, many of us have similar frustrations or possible solutions.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The MAY Checklist

## Your Wardrobe

### Folded Items:

- Underwear
- Sleepwear
- Exercise gear
- T-shirts
- Jeans
- Knitwear
- Shorts

### Hanging Items:

- Dresses
- Skirts
- Pants
- Occasional items (formal wear etc)
- Shirts/Tops
- Suits
- Jackets

### Accessories:

- Belts
- Scarves
- Jewellery
- Hats
- Miscellaneous
- Shoes

## Kids Wardrobe 1

## Kids Wardrobe 2

## Kids Wardrobe 3

## Kids Wardrobe 4

## Kids Wardrobe 5

## Kids Wardrobe 6

### Folded Items:

- Underwear
- Sleepwear
- Sporting gear
- T-shirts
- Jeans
- Knitwear
- Shorts

### Hanging Items:

- Dresses
- Skirts
- Pants
- Shirts/Tops
- School uniform
- Jackets

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

# JUNE: Kitchen

This month's task list brings us to the heart of our homes - that is, the kitchen and dining room.

Think about everything that happens in this part of the home, and it's really little wonder they wind up full of clutter. Mail, paperwork, handbags, schoolbags, junk drawers, mobile phones, tablets, car keys, homework, cooking, eating, entertaining, relaxing - these two areas have so much going on.

This month we will tackle the fairly large tasks of decluttering and simplifying these areas. So let's get to it!

The amount of time you need to set aside for this month's challenge depends on:

- the size of your home
- how much stuff you own
- how much of your stuff is being used
- whether you have a separate formal dining room and a more casual meals area, or if you eat in the kitchen
- how much entertaining you do
- the size of your family and the groups you entertain
- whether you and your friends/family drink wine and cocktails
- whether you're a keen gourmand or a simpler cook
- the size of your kitchen and pantry
- the amount of storage you use for kitchenware etc

As an estimate, I would suggest you give yourself 3-5 hours to declutter the kitchen (easily broken down into smaller tasks) and another 2-3 hours for the dining room.

For example, you could break the kitchen tasks into the following:

- cutlery and utensils drawers - 15 minutes
- fridge (inside) - 45 minutes
- fridge (top) - 15 minutes
- freezer - 30 minutes
- pantry - 45 minutes
- wall cabinets (top) - 15 minutes
- wall cabinets (inside) - 45 minutes
- benchtops - 30 minutes
- low cabinets (inside) - 45 minutes
- remaining drawers - 45 minutes

The following resources will help inspire and motivate you throughout the month:

[Slow Kitchen Pinterest board](#)

[10 Ways to Create a Beautiful, Simple Kitchen](#)

[10 Steps to an Organised Kitchen](#)

[Decluttering That Kitchen](#) (via 365 Things)

How to Set Up a Minimalist Kitchen: [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#) (via Stone Soup)

Visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share any problems you may be having or any questions you have when it comes to creating a clutter-free kitchen space. Chances are, many of us have been there before, or are there right now!

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The JUNE Checklist

## Kitchen

### Wall/Upper Cabinets:

- Top of cabinets
- Glassware
- Crockery
- Cookbooks
- Bakeware
- Baking tins

### Lower Cabinets:

- Pots and pans
- Cleaning equipment
- Appliances
- Large appliances (rice cooker etc)
- Platters
- Large crockery items

### Pantry:

- Staples
- Non-perishables
- Perishables
- Herbs and spices
- Dry goods
- Tea and coffee

### Fridge/Freezer:

- Inside
- Top
- Outside

### Benchtops:

- Appliances (coffee machine, toaster etc)
- Fruit bowl
- Clutter hotspots (paper, devices, keys etc)

### Drawers:

- Cutlery
- Junk drawer
- Utensils
- Plastics/Tupperware

## Dining Room

- Dining Table
- Dining Chairs
- Linens
- Buffet/Sideboard
- Platters
- Decor

**Total Items Decluttered:** \_\_\_\_\_

# CLUTTER QUESTIONNAIRE -- Halfway

Now that we're halfway through our year of simplifying, it's a great time to revisit the questionnaire we completed at the beginning of Month 1.

By taking 15 minutes to complete the questions, you will get a good sense of just how far you've progressed over the past 6 months. Whether you feel like it or not, you are so much closer to a clutter-free home than you were at the beginning!

As before, these questions are designed to give you a realistic overview of your current situation. There are no right or wrong answers and no good or bad answers. It's simply important to measure your progress as we move through the handbook.

Print off the survey and take some time to think through your answers. It will also help you to walk through each room as needed and evaluate the current situation.

Once you've completed it, compare your answers this time to those given 6 months ago.

- Have you improved your overall clutter rating?
- Do you feel better about your home?
- Do you feel more comfortable in your home?
- Are you keeping count of the items leaving your home?
- Is it more or less than you'd like?
- Where do you want to focus your attention in the second half of the year?

Feel free to share your progress with the [Facebook group](#), or ask any questions about your current problem area.



## SECTION 1 - Your Home

1. Do you live in a:

- house
- apartment
- townhouse
- flat
- duplex
- trailer
- other

2. How many bedrooms do you have?

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3. How many levels ?

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4. How many rooms in your home in total?

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5. How many cupboards/closets or wardrobes?

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6. How many storage rooms? (Including linen cupboard, basement, attic, etc.)

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7. How many outbuildings? (Including sheds, garages, studios, etc.)

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8. Do you rent any extra storage space outside your home?

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## SECTION 2 - Your Clutter

On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being sparse and 10 being hoarder-type clutter) rate the current clutter situation for each of the following applicable rooms:

Entryway	1	-----	5	-----	10
Kitchen	1	-----	5	-----	10
Dining	1	-----	5	-----	10
Living	1	-----	5	-----	10
TV Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Playroom	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallway 1	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallyway 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Hallway 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Office/Study	1	-----	5	-----	10
Master Bedroom	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 4	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 5	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bedroom 6	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Guest Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Wardrobe/Closet	1	-----	5	-----	10
Laundry Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Ensuite	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bathroom 2	1	-----	5	-----	10
Bathroom 3	1	-----	5	-----	10
Powder Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Linen cupboard	1	-----	5	-----	10
Store Room	1	-----	5	-----	10
Basement	1	-----	5	-----	10
Attic	1	-----	5	-----	10
Front Patio	1	-----	5	-----	10
Back Patio	1	-----	5	-----	10
Garage	1	-----	5	-----	10
Garden Shed	1	-----	5	-----	10
External studio	1	-----	5	-----	10

## SECTION 3: You, Your Housemates and their Habits

1. Who do you live with?

- Housemates/Friends
- Partner
- Kids
- Grandkids
- Carer
- Parents
- In-Laws
- Other

2. What are their ages?

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3. Are they messy? Tidy? Helpful? Enthusiastic?

Note down a little about each of the people you live with.

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4. Are you currently studying?

YES / NO

5. Is anyone else in the home studying?

YES / NO

6. Are there a lot of materials (books, papers, supplies) involved in this study?

YES / NO

7. Do you have space to keep it?

YES / NO

8. What do you do for work?

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9. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

10. What do your housemates do for work?

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11. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

12. Is there space to store it?

YES / NO

13. Do you participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

14. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

15. Does anyone else participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

16. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

17. Is there space to store this currently?

YES / NO

18. Do you live with kids?  
What are their ages?

YES / NO

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19. Are they likely to be helpful in the decluttering process? YES / NO

20. On a scale of one to ten (with 1 being very few and 10 being an overwhelming amount) how many toys do your kids own?

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

21. Is there enough room to store them? YES / NO  
22. Is your partner open to the idea of decluttering? YES / NO  
23. Is your partner/spouse a sentimental person? YES / NO  
24. Are you are a sentimental person? YES / NO  
25. Do you find it difficult to let go of mementoes? YES / NO

26. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being very happy and 10 being very unhappy) rate how you feel about the current clutter situation in your home.

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

27. List the top 5 areas of clutter in your home you are most concerned about.

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28. If you could choose one word to describe how you hope to feel in your home once this handbook is completed, what would it be? (Think positive - content, calm, happy, relaxed, etc.)

**Once you've completed the survey, file it away somewhere you will remember, so you can compare circumstances when we revisit the same questions in a few months. The aim is to recycle all three 2015 surveys once the 12 months are up and you have reached your decluttering goal.**

## JULY: BIG Jobs

Let's face it, it's never going to feel like a good time to tackle the clutter in your garage. Or your attic. Or your basement. Or your store room.

These are Big Jobs.

Overwhelming jobs. Jobs that get put off until a long weekend, or until the clutter tumbles out and pins you to the ground.

But guess what? This month, we're all about Big Jobs. Because as annoying as it is, tackling them now is infinitely better than freaking out in November and rushing to get the house in order before the holiday season.

Please Note: Many of you are in the middle of summer (for which I am extremely envious) and you may be tempted to say, "Why would I waste my time decluttering when I could be enjoying the sunshine?" But instead think of this as the last time you will ever have to face an overflowing basement full of stuff. Because this is the summer that your home and your life changes for the better.

You've been decluttering for at least 6 months now, working through your home and strengthening your decision-making muscle. You're ready to tackle some of the big, overwhelming tasks.

Yes, decluttering the garage, the basement or the attic is a lot to do in one month. But you're ready, you can do this. And don't forget - you can work through these tasks at your own pace. There's no medal for being first over the line. The prize is in the doing.

Before you begin just know that - despite all your best intentions - this will not be the last time you tackle these areas. It will be the most difficult time, but it won't be the last.

That's simply because as you continue to simplify, your ideas of 'enough', 'need' and 'just in case' will shift. Over time, you will need less and want less, but that takes time.

**So for now, know it won't be perfect, know you won't get it completely perfect, and start anyway.**

The amount of time you need to set aside for this month's challenge depends on the usual factors, such as:

- size of your home and who lives there. (Is it an apartment? Or a sprawling suburban home?)
- amount of storage space in your home. (Do you have an attic, garage and basement? Or is your storage space a cupboard in the hallway?)
- level of clutter you are beginning with. A more cluttered space means it will take longer to navigate and clear the area.

As an estimate, you can expect to spend anywhere between 2-10 hours in each space.

You can easily break the list into smaller tasks, however. One single shelf in the attic, two storage boxes in the garage - if you break it into smaller chunks and work through each space as best you can, you will see a huge difference in no time.

### **This month we're working through the following spaces:**

- attic
- garage
- storeroom
- basement
- additional storage spaces throughout the home

As always, not every one of these areas will apply to you. Simply work through the ones that do.

As these are often such big spaces, try to approach your decluttering efforts with some pre-planning. Otherwise you're likely to start one task, only to be distracted by another box full of stuff you'd forgotten about, and end up not achieving a great deal.

## Tips for Tackling Big Jobs

1. Choose the easiest space to start with. Try working on a flat surface (a shelf, one corner of the floor, one surface in a closet) and keeping it defined. It's much easier to start and finish when you know the boundaries you're dealing with. Empty the space as much as you can and clean down the surfaces. Then, container by container, piece by piece, work through the items.
2. Challenge yourself to see how many storage boxes you can rid yourself of.
3. Store like items together once you've finished decluttering – it will make the follow-up much easier.

It's not perfect, but when faced with the prospect of decluttering a huge space, it really does help to use a strategy that limits your attention.

Also, if you're feeling overwhelmed, the following resources might be helpful to you:

[3 Questions for Decluttering Sentimental Items](#)

[How to do a Big Declutter](#) (via 365 Less Things)

[The Big Basement Challenge](#) (via Mom of 6)

[Decluttering the Basement](#) (via The Sleepy Time Gal - the tips at the end of this one are very simple but really worth reading)

As always, please feel free to visit the private [Facebook Group](#) and share any problems you may be having or any specific issues you're having with decluttering such a large space.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The JULY Checklist

- Garage**
- Attic**
- Basement**
- Storeroom**
- Additional storage**

These tasks can apply to all or none of the above spaces, simply check them off when applicable to the room you're currently working through:

- Storage boxes:
  - sentimental items
  - baby items
  - childhood items
  - unused gifts
  - just in case items
  
- Loose items on floor
- Recreational equipment
- Loose items on shelves
  - Old school/college books
- Paints, chemicals
- Cleaning equipment
- Garden tools
- Hobby equipment

**Total Items Decluttered:** \_\_\_\_\_

## AUGUST: Living Spaces

Over time, and as our access to technology has increased, the term 'living room' has come to mean 'entertainment/media/TV room' in most modern homes. A living room will typically include a TV, games console, DVD player and stereo, as well as books, toys, games and possibly even somewhere to sit and have a conversation.

Instead of thinking specifically about the decluttering during this month, try viewing it as an opportunity to rethink how you use your living spaces.

As you move through each space, decluttering and paring back, consider shifting the focus of your living spaces back to living. That is, return the focus to people, conversation, relationships, reading and listening to music – rather than simply watching TV.

While most homes will always have a television, try making it a secondary use of the space, rather than the sole use. You could move the TV to the corner of the room, or arrange the room into a more conversational shape, with the furniture all facing centre, rather than the television set on the wall. Even try it out for a month and see if it makes a difference to the way your home feels.

This month we're focusing on the living spaces in our homes. Depending on the size and layout of yours, this will include some or all of the following areas:

- lounge room
- TV/Media room
- playroom
- hobby room
- library

For most of us, these spaces will be a combination of rooms, rather than five separate living spaces.

But to make these tasks as easy as possible, it will be easier and simpler if you can separate the space you do have into different zones, loosely based on the five areas listed above. Otherwise what seems like a relatively easy space to declutter will become overwhelming – fast.

As you move through each space, really try to shift the focus of your living areas back to living – rather than simply watching TV.

The time this month's tasks will take is, as always, entirely dependent on the size of your home, who lives there and how much stuff you own to begin with. As an estimate I suggest you allow 1.5 hours per living space, with an extra 1 hour for media collections (such as DVDs and CDs) and another 1 hour for books.



## 5 Tips for Tackling the Living Spaces in your Home

1. Target flat surfaces first. The TV unit, shelves, the bookshelf and the top of cupboards, in particular. Clearing these areas of clutter will have a huge impact on how cluttered the room feels.
2. Work through the contents of cupboards and drawers one at a time. Ensure you finish one space before moving on to the next.
3. Move your furniture to clear out the clutter underneath. Not only will you likely find things you'd lost, but you can also find a great deal of stuff to toss.
4. Cast a critical eye over your decor, knick-knacks and wall hangings. If they are not beautiful, meaningful or useful, consider if they have a place in your home at all.
5. Keep 'messy' items like craft supplies organised and out of sight. Storage baskets are useful in this case, as they contain the items and help keep them organised.

If you're still struggling for suggestions, ideas and tips, here are some great resources to check out:

[Alicia Parsons talks about craft storage](#)

[21 Ways to Tame the Toys](#)

[Declutter: Tackling the Toy Box](#)

[Breaking the Sentimental Attachment to Books](#) (Becoming Minimalist)

[How to Declutter your Media Cabinet in 1 Hour](#) (Mom of 6)

[Deb's Craft Room Declutter](#) (365 Less Things)

Feel free to share any problems or burning questions with the private [Facebook group](#). Most of us will have struggled with the same issues at some point.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The AUGUST Checklist

## TV Room

### Entertainment Unit:

- Cupboards
- Drawers
- Shelves
- CD collection
- Console remotes, cords and chargers
- Underneath
- Electronics
- DVD collection

## Play Room

- Toys
- Craft items
- Kids craft
- Games
- Art supplies
- Books

## Living Room

### Bookshelves:

- Books
- Knick-knacks
- Photos

### Coffee table/side table:

- Magazines
- Drawers
- Knick-knacks
- TV remotes

### Furniture (do you need all these?)

- Side tables
- Bookshelves
- Entertainment unit
- Coffee tables
- Lamps

## Hobby/Craft Room:

- Craft materials
- Instruments and equipment
- Bulk items
- Excess storage units
- Catalogues
- Supplies

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

## SEPTEMBER: Memories

Welcome to the Month of Memories, where we will be tackling the difficult areas of sentimental items, photographs, knick-knacks, souvenirs, hand-me-downs and keepsakes.

This month is a little different to most, as we're not so much focusing on a particular space, but rather items that we may have ignored over the previous months as they are too laden with emotion or guilt.

Depending on how sentimental you and your family are, how many knick-knacks and keepsakes you own, and how ready you are to let some of them go, this month's checklist could take anywhere from a few hours to an entire month to complete. And that's OK.

This is one of those months that simply need to be worked through at your own pace, because decluttering sentimental items is hard, and is much more emotional than decluttering the kitchen drawers or the bookshelf.

To make this month's tasks as easy as possible, separate your home into zones based loosely on the following areas:

- dining and kitchen (glassware, crockery etc)
- storage (specifically boxes of sentimental items)
- bedrooms
- living spaces (knick-knacks, photos etc)

Remember, we're just working through the sentimental items in each of these spaces, NOT the entire space again.

As I've been creating this checklist I was reminded of a reader's story, and I wanted to include it here as required reading before we dive into the sometimes tricky task of decluttering memories and sentimental items.

## My Mother's Legacy.

Recently I received an email from a reader, let's call her Jane.

Her mother recently passed away and Jane, an only child, had the task of clearing out the family home before it was sold.

She wrote to me so completely overwhelmed with the job, unable to start. Unable to make a single decision about this house full of stuff. Unable to remove her mother's memory from the decisions she needed to make.

"How do I even begin? None of the stuff here means anything to me, but it obviously did to my mum. How can I tell what needs keeping and what can be thrown away?"

Unfortunately for Jane, her mother's legacy had already been passed on. She had no say in it. She simply had to spend weeks of her life – weeks away from her husband and kids, from her friends and her work – dealing with that legacy.

Do you think her mother would have wanted that?

No. By all accounts, her mother was a wonderful woman. A great provider, a gentle spirit with a streak of wicked humour.

But Jane's mum simply didn't consider that her actions – keeping a house full of old stuff – would one day hold consequences for her much-loved daughter.

She just didn't consider it.

So as we dive into the difficult task of decluttering sentimental items over the next few weeks, ask yourself what it is that you're really leaving behind.

This month is not about needing to give away your grandmother's pearls or your child's first lock of hair. But there are three questions you need to ask yourself when decluttering sentimental items.

### **1. Does this item mean something to me?**

Often we keep things because we think we "should". Or because it is representative of good times, fun holidays, our now-grown children, or people we love. But does the actual item, the thing you're holding in your hand mean something to you?

If not (and you may be surprised by how many of these things do not mean anything on close inspection) then the decision to remove it from your home should be simple. Decide whether to donate it or throw it away.

### **2. What emotion does this item bring out?**

If you've decided the item does mean something to you, then ask yourself what emotion you feel upon holding it.

Study that emotion for a moment. What is it? Why do you feel it? Would you still feel that emotion without the physical item? (If yes, then your decision has again been made. Decide to donate or throw away.)

Do you have multiple items that rouse the same emotion? What if you kept one or two that are truly meaningful, instead of keeping everything as a blanket reaction?

If there is no strong emotional attachment, then again, you can more easily decide to remove it from your home.

### **3. Would I display the item in my home?**

We all keep things that we wouldn't display in our home. And it's not my intention to have you remove everything that you wouldn't hang on the wall. But asking yourself this question forces you again to really examine why you're holding on to the item and what the item itself means to you.

If you wouldn't display it, then really examine your reasons for keeping it. (Remember, there is no right or wrong here. But the intention is to pare down and simplify these sentimental things.)

Asking these questions means you are doing what's right for you and your life, rather than following a set of rules. It also means tackling the sentimental stuff takes longer and is more emotionally draining than decluttering, say, the kitchen drawers or wardrobes. So be patient with yourself. Take time. Don't let go of certain things if you are really having trouble with it.

## How to Declutter Sentimental Items

1. Choose a very small area:

- one storage box of keepsakes
- a shelf of knick-knacks
- a cupboard of old toys or clothes from your grown-up children

2. Grab a garbage bag, a recycle bag and a donate box.

3. As you pick up each item, ask yourself the above questions. Once you've decided whether to keep the item, donate it or throw it away – you can let go and be proud.

### A Note on Photos:

Most of us have many boxes and albums full of old photos that we would like to organise - either digitally or physically.

It's a huge undertaking and may take weeks or months to work through, so my suggestion is to work through all your other sentimental items and leave the photographs for another time. When it is time to work through the photos, the process is quite simple (but time-consuming!)

1. Sort through the photos, deciding which to keep, which to scan and which to discard.
2. As you are sorting through them, categorise them loosely either by date, event or person.
3. Work through the photos one-by-one, scanning, renaming and filing each one.
4. Once you've worked through the physical photos, scanning all those you want to keep, discard the physical copies, throw out the albums and think about creating a photobook.
5. Create a photobook for each era, year, event or person you'd like to commemorate.

After all this, if you're still struggling for suggestions, ideas and tips, here are some great resources to check out:

[So You Married a Pack-Rat](#)

[On All the Sentimental Stuff and Clutter](#) (Be More With Less)

[Difficulty Parting with Sentimental Items](#) (Unclutterer)

[Decluttering Tips for the Sentimentalist](#) (Apartment Therapy)

[Sentimental Clutter](#) (Rethinking the Dream)

Also feel free to share any problems or questions with the private [Facebook group](#). Most of us will have struggled with the same issues at some point and are always happy to brainstorm solutions. Remember - you're not alone in this!

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The SEPTEMBER Checklist

- Dining Room / Kitchen
  - Decor
  - 'Good' China
  - Hand-me-down appliances
  - Servingware
  - Crystalware
  
- Storage (boxes/collections of sentimental items)
  - Holiday souvenirs
  - Old school books
  - Photos
  - Baby items
  - Unused gifts
  - Unfinished projects
  - Kids artwork
  - College/university papers
  - Childhood toys
    - Family items/heirlooms
  - Items to pass on to your kids
  
- Bedrooms
  - Decor
  - Knick-knacks
  - Furniture
  - Clothing from a special day
  - Jewellery
  - Unused gifts
  - Soft furnishings
  
- Hobby/Craft Room:
  - Unfinished projects
  - Unused materials
  
- Living Spaces:
  - Decor
  - Knick-knacks
  - Photos
  - Wall hangings
  - Unfinished/unread books
  - Photo albums

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

# OCTOBER: Change

As we approach the end of the year (but before we hit the madness of late-November through December) it's time to work through the areas of our home that require a seasonal change. In the case of the Northern Hemisphere, this will be a change from summer to winter, while in the Southern Hemisphere, we're heading from winter to summer.

**The focus areas of this month's checklist are the:**

- linen cupboard
- general and seasonal decor
- wardrobe
- garage/basement

Specifically, we're focusing on the seasonal items. Winter linens, coats, snow gear, throw rugs, heaters and boots will come out of storage for some. While in other parts of the world, it's time to pack those things away and bring out the summer gear.

These tasks, while relatively small in comparison to those you've already worked through, provide the perfect opportunity to do a little work now and reassess which items you actually use, need, like and care about.

As I've said before, it's amazing how quickly items that used to be 'necessary' actually become clutter, and taking the time to revisit your seasonal stuff in this period of transition makes it even easier to sift out more of what you no longer need.

The amount of time you need to set aside for this month's challenge depends on how different your seasons are. For example, some people don't need to switch out linens and clothing because their climate is mild. While others have huge seasonal swings (yes I'm looking at you, Canada) that require entirely different clothes, outerwear and recreational gear.

You can expect to spend between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours on each of the areas listed below. Again, dependent on how much you have, who lives in your home, the recreational gear you own and the storage situation.

You can easily break the list into smaller tasks too. Tackling the linen one week, the garage or basement over the weekend or the seasonal clothing one evening.

As always, pop in to the [Facebook group](#) and share what you're working on or what you're struggling with. We've all been through something similar and the cheerful support in the group is bound to help you feel more optimistic as you work through this project.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.



# The OCTOBER checklist

- Linen Cupboard
  - Sheets
  - 'Good' China
  - Quilts/Duvets
  - Guest linen
  - Throws
  - Pillows
  - Towels
  
- Wardrobes
  - Swimwear
  - Winter coats
  - Scarves
  - Boots
  - Lightweight clothing
  - Sandals
  - Summer dresses
  - Shorts
  - Winter uniforms for school/sport
  
- Specialist Clothing (Hiking/Snow gear)
  
- Basement/Garage
  - Seasonal recreational gear (fishing, skiing)
  - Beach/pool gear
  - Outdoor furniture
  
- Seasonal Decor
  - Soft furnishings (cushions, throws)
  - Tabletop decor (vases, bowls, runners)
  - Mantle, coffee table and hall stand decor

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

## NOVEMBER: Consolidation

We're nearing the end of the year, meaning you've worked your way through almost an entire 12 months of targeted decluttering. Congratulations!

As we come into the busiest time of year, the last thing we need is a great long list of extra things to do, right?

So instead, this month is all about tightening up and re-visiting the work you've done throughout the year. And in fact, this is where you really start to see the benefits. Now you will see just how much less work it is to keep on top of things.

No longer is it a completely daunting task to declutter the kitchen or wardrobe. The hours you've put in over the year have made an enormous difference!

That being said, there is almost certainly still work to be done. (Sorry - no time off just yet!)

But instead of focusing on just one area of the home, this month's tasks cover all major zones. We're aiming to do a quick declutter of all main areas, consolidating the work you've done to this point.

The key areas to focus on are the flat surfaces in each room. Decluttering these spaces gives you the best results, and they are most likely to have accumulated clutter over the past few months.

While you may think your time is better spent elsewhere, like with any new skill, chances are you have gotten better at decluttering over the year. I can almost guarantee you will find many things that were passed over during your first (or even second) round of decluttering that you can easily let go of now.

Similarly, the process of decluttering has probably become very familiar to you now, so the time you need to allow for each area is much less. 10-30 minutes is all you will need to spend in each space, which is easily divided over a month, or tackled in one or two large chunks of time over a weekend or evening.

In fact, why not challenge yourself by setting a timer for each space you declutter, and try to beat the clock? It's amazing the motivation you get when there's a little competition!

Feel free to share any problems or burning questions with the private [Facebook group](#). Most of us will have struggled with the same issues at some point.

If you've decided to keep track of your decluttering efforts by counting, don't forget to keep a tally of the number of items that have left your home. Feel free to post them in the Facebook group or simply keep them private and use the growing number to help motivate you as we progress.

# The NOVEMBER Checklist

- Bedrooms
  - Bedside tables
  - Seating
  - Wardrobe (target piles)
  - Bed (linen, cushions etc)
  - Drawers
  - Under beds (esp. kids)
- Bathrooms
  - Cabinets
  - Drawers (empty, out of date)
  - Decor
  - Bath toys
- Living and Family Rooms
  - TV unit
  - Coffee table
  - Lounge/armchairs (cushions, throws)
  - Bookshelves
  - Drawers
  - Side tables
- Kitchen and Dining Room:
  - Benchtops (clutter zones)
  - Utensils drawer
  - Buffet/secondary storage
  - Cutlery drawer
  - Dining table
- Entry:
  - Hall table
  - Coatrack/hatstand
  - Seating
- Laundry:
  - Benchtops (piles, ironing, clothes etc)
  - Cupboards

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

# DECEMBER: Celebration

This is it - the final month of the Simple Living Handbook. Congratulations - you made it through!

Last month's tasks and checklist were all about consolidating the work you've done this year. This means that, although you may not feel like it - there's far less for you to do in terms of decluttering now that it's December. Which is a good thing, considering there's so much else to think about at this time of the year.

That being said, if you're still feeling overwhelmed whenever you look around your home, never fear! I've written the [Amazingly Awesome Pre-Holiday Declutter Guide](#) to help get things under control within a week. [Check it out here](#), complete any tasks that you need to, and then come back and complete the short list of tasks assigned to this month.

You'll be focusing on the following areas this month (after which you will have not only cleared out any remaining clutter, but also have the space to deal with any incoming gifts you or your family might receive):

- toys: in preparation for any incoming gifts over the holiday season
- holiday decor: as you pull out your decorations for the upcoming celebrations, declutter those you no longer need, want or like
- kitchen: this is the hub of the home over the holiday season, ensure things run as smoothly as possible by creating a calm, clutter-free space now
- guest rooms: many of us host friends or family over this period and by getting the guest spaces organised, you will be able to enjoy your guests company and not stress out in the days leading up to their stay

The length of time taken to complete this month's task list will vary, depending on who lives in your home, the current level of clutter, the ways you celebrate the holidays and how or if you decorate specifically for the season.

Allow approximately 30-60 minutes for each area, remembering that we're aiming for a light declutter. Who needs a huge list of to-dos at this time of year? There's already enough going on!

If you're still struggling for suggestions, ideas and tips, here are some great resources to check out:

[The Amazingly Awesome Pre-Holiday Declutter Guide](#)

[Decluttering for the Holidays](#) (Oprah)

[Holiday Clean-Up](#) (Organized Home)

[Organise and Declutter Your Home for the Holidays](#) (Additude Mag)

After that, please go and enjoy the holiday season with your family, friends and loved ones.

# The DECEMBER Checklist

- Toys (Bedroom and Playroom)
  - Soft toys
  - Toys no longer used
  - Broken, worn out toys
  - Forgotten toys (under beds)
  
- Holiday Decor
  - Decorations
  - Linen (tablecloths, handtowels etc)
  - Servingware
  
- Kitchen
  - Fridge - inside
  - Fridge - top
  - Utensils
  - Microwave - inside
  - Oven - inside and out
  - Fridge - outside
  - Junk drawer
  - Benchtops
  - Microwave - top
  
- Guest Rooms:
  - Under the beds
  - Wardrobe/cupboards
  - Drawers/secondary storage
  - Side tables
  - Linen

Total Items Decluttered: \_\_\_\_\_

## CLUTTER QUESTIONNAIRE -- Month #12

You've just completed 12 months of decluttering, and in doing so have created a life that is simpler, easier and more relaxed. You've also come such a long way in creating a slower home, and I hope you're feeling the beautiful benefits!

Before you finish up for the year, you should revisit the Clutter Questionnaire for the third and final time.

By taking 15 minutes to complete the questions, you will get a great sense of just how much you've improved your home, your life and your well-being over the past 12 months. This has not been an easy thing to do, and I really want you to take some time to see just how far you've progressed. You should be very proud!

As before, these questions are designed to give you a realistic overview of your current situation. There's no right or wrong, and there's no good or bad. Really, I just want you to see how far you've come!

Print off the survey and take some time to think through your answers. It will also help you to walk through each room as needed and evaluate the current situation.

Once you've completed the questionnaire, compare your answers to those given both 12 months and 6 months ago.

- Have you improved your overall clutter rating?
- Do you feel better about your home?
- Do you feel more comfortable in your home?
- Did you keep count of the items that left your home?
- Was it more or less than you'd like?
- Where, if anywhere, do you want to focus your attention next?
- Are there areas that still need work?

Once you've worked through your answers, come by the [Facebook group](#) and share your improvements, your lessons learnt and any areas you want to improve on.

## SECTION 1 - Your Home

1. Do you live in a:

- house
- apartment
- townhouse
- flat
- duplex
- trailer
- other

2. How many bedrooms do you have?

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3. How many levels ?

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4. How many rooms in your home in total?

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5. How many cupboards/closets or wardrobes?

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6. How many storage rooms? (Including linen cupboard, basement, attic, etc.)

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7. How many outbuildings? (Including sheds, garages, studios, etc.)

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8. Do you rent any extra storage space outside your home?

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## SECTION 2 - Your Clutter

On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being sparse and 10 being hoarder-type clutter) rate the current clutter situation for each of the following applicable rooms:

Entryway	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Kitchen	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Dining	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Living	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
TV Room	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Playroom	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Hallway 1	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Hallyway 2	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Hallway 3	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Office/Study	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Master Bedroom	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bedroom 2	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bedroom 3	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bedroom 4	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bedroom 5	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bedroom 6	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Guest Room	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Wardrobe/Closet	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Laundry Room	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Ensuite	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bathroom 2	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Bathroom 3	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Powder Room	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Linen cupboard	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Store Room	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Basement	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Attic	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Front Patio	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Back Patio	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Garage	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
Garden Shed	1 ----- 5 ----- 10
External studio	1 ----- 5 ----- 10



## SECTION 3: You, Your Housemates and their Habits

1. Who do you live with?

- Housemates/Friends
- Partner
- Kids
- Grandkids
- Carer
- Parents
- In-Laws
- Other

2. What are their ages?

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3. Are they messy? Tidy? Helpful? Enthusiastic?

Note down a little about each of the people you live with.

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4. Are you currently studying?

YES / NO

5. Is anyone else in the home studying?

YES / NO

6. Are there a lot of materials (books, papers, supplies) involved in this study?

YES / NO

7. Do you have space to keep it?

YES / NO

8. What do you do for work?

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9. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

10. What do your housemates do for work?

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11. Are there a lot of materials involved in this work?

YES / NO

12. Is there space to store it?

YES / NO

13. Do you participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

14. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

15. Does anyone else participate in any hobbies?

YES / NO

16. Are there a lot of materials involved?

YES / NO

17. Is there space to store this currently?

YES / NO

18. Do you live with kids?  
What are their ages?

YES / NO

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19. Are they likely to be helpful in the decluttering process? YES / NO

20. On a scale of one to ten (with 1 being very few and 10 being an overwhelming amount) how many toys do your kids own?

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

21. Is there enough room to store them? YES / NO  
22. Is your partner open to the idea of decluttering? YES / NO  
23. Is your partner/spouse a sentimental person? YES / NO  
24. Are you are a sentimental person? YES / NO  
25. Do you find it difficult to let go of mementoes? YES / NO

26. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being very happy and 10 being very unhappy) rate how you feel about the current clutter situation in your home.

1 ----- 5 ----- 10

27. List the top 5 areas of clutter in your home you are most concerned about.

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28. If you could choose one word to describe how you now feel in your home, at the end of the Challenge, what would it be?

**Once you've completed the survey, take a moment to compare your answers to those given in both Month 1 and Month 6. What was your progress like? Are there any areas you want to keep working on? Pop in to the [Facebook group](#) and let us know!**

**And that's (almost) it!**

Before you pop the champagne, it's time to run the numbers.

If you've not been keeping count, that's perfectly awesome too. I know many of us don't care so much about the number of items we let go of during this process, only the impact it has on our homes and well being.

BUT if you have been tallying up totals at the end of each month, now is your chance to add them all together and see just how much hard work you've done this year.

## Annual Decluttering Totals

January \_\_\_\_\_

February \_\_\_\_\_

March \_\_\_\_\_

April \_\_\_\_\_

May \_\_\_\_\_

June \_\_\_\_\_

July \_\_\_\_\_

August \_\_\_\_\_

September \_\_\_\_\_

October \_\_\_\_\_

November \_\_\_\_\_

December \_\_\_\_\_

**Grand Total Items Decluttered:** \_\_\_\_\_

After 12 months, you've completed the Simple Living Handbook!

I just wanted to say a massive thank you for being a part of it, and I hope it's helped you create a simpler, slower, happier way of life.

Simplifying our life has been one of the best decisions I've ever made. Over the past four years I've learned to be content, as well as how to focus on the people and experiences that matter. I'm happier and healthier, and my dream is to keep spreading the word about simple, slow living so that others can also share in the joy of living with less.

If you have feedback, suggestions or questions about the program, or any thoughts on how we can continue to grow it into the future, please feel free to [send me an email](#). I'd love to hear from you!

In the meantime, enjoy the end of the year celebrations, and I hope that next is another incredible year for you.

Much love,

**Brooke xx**