












## HOW TO GET RID OF ANYTHING

Clothes  you never wear. Outgrown baby gear , old cell phones , sunglasses , skis, and those Styrofoam peanuts you're "saving for later." If any of these things are cluttering up your home, help  is here. Our A-to-Z guide to shedding unwanted stuff goes way beyond putting it on the curb  or in a landfill. Learn how to dispose, discard, and donate in a targeted  and responsible way; save the planet ; and even make some money  while you're at it. Ready for a clean sweep  this spring ? Let the purge begin!



## A

## Air Conditioners

You're not the only one who wants to replace that ancient, wheezing window unit. So does your utility company, since models made more than 10 years ago can hog energy. Whatever you do, don't throw it out: The refrigerants are bad for the environment and need to be safely removed.

Ask your utility company if it offers rebates for replacing your old A/Cs with Energy Star models. And check with your municipality and local solid-waste management company to find out how to recycle them; some cities will pick up from your curb.

## B



## BABY CLOTHES &amp; GEAR ...

Little ones grow up and out of things so quickly. Here are three ways to get everything from onesies to bouncy chairs into the right hands.

- **SELL** Take brand-name clothes that are less than two years old and in near-new condition to a consignment shop, which will split the proceeds with you. If you don't want to wait to get paid, **Once Upon a Child** will offer you cash in hand, but you may receive less up front. For either route, items in less than tip-top shape won't earn you much, or will get rejected outright ([onceuponachild.com](http://onceuponachild.com)).

- **DONATE** For easy drop-offs across the U.S., see Donate in One Stop, page 123. Some other smart options: **Loved Twice** collects infant clothing in sizes 0 to 12 months to give to low-income mothers as they leave the hospital. Locations are in California only; partner organizations collect mail-in donations ([lovedtwice.org](http://lovedtwice.org)). **Good+ Foundation** collects clothes and gear for infants and kids through age 14, plus maternity wear. It has drop-off locations (or will pick up for a fee) in L.A. and NYC, and the website lists sister organizations in a dozen other cities ([goodplusfoundation.org](http://goodplusfoundation.org)). Most charities won't take car seats for many reasons, including the difficulty of tracking recalls. If your seat has not been in an accident, was manufactured less than six years ago, and hasn't been recalled, check with local women's shelters about donating.

- **RECYCLE** Facilities in some states accept car seats; visit [recycleyourcarseat.org](http://recycleyourcarseat.org). If you're done with a breast pump, the manufacturer Medela will take its models back for recycling; you pay postage and keep the plastic tubing and other accessories (which you may be able to recycle normally).

## BATTERIES ...

In most municipalities, you can throw out AA alkalines with your regular trash, but batteries are generally recyclable. Rechargeable, car, and most watch batteries should be brought to in-store and community recycling bins. For extra-good karma, drop off your regular alkalines at the same time.

## BOOKS ...

Many public libraries and **Friends of the Library** accept donations for book sales, and **Books for Soldiers** sends paperbacks to members of the military ([booksforsoldiers.com](http://booksforsoldiers.com)). **Books for Africa** sends reference books, textbooks, fiction, and nonfiction to students in Africa ([booksforafrica.org](http://booksforafrica.org)). As a last resort, mildewy or stained paperbacks can usually be recycled with mixed paper. And the **American Library Association** has a fantastic page with suggestions for where to donate ([libguides.ala.org/book-donations](http://libguides.ala.org/book-donations)), including what to do with encyclopedias, which most places don't take. Our favorite: Give one to a theater to use as a prop.

## CELL PHONES &amp; COMPUTERS

A refurbished rare Nokia mobile phone sold for more than a thousand dollars as a collector's item, but you'd be surprised how much even a two-year-old phone or laptop is worth. If your gadget works and is of recent vintage, you can trade it in for decent money, gift cards, or rebates at **Gazelle**, **Amazon**, or **Best Buy**. Go to those sites and plug in your make, model, and other details to get an estimate. If it's worthless, recycle it, but first back up your phone or computer, then wipe the memory clean (don't just delete the files, because someone could use a data-recovery program to find personal information like passwords, medical information, and tax forms). The easiest places to donate or recycle them are **Best Buy** and **Staples** stores, and some **Goodwill** locations.

## D

### Designer Clothes ...

Dozens of websites resell clothing—here's how to choose. For ease, try **Thred Up** ([thredup.com](http://thredup.com)) or **The RealReal** ([therealreal.com](http://therealreal.com)), which pick up or provide you with free shipping kits to send in your discards for sale online. Some users complain that the payout is low, so keep expectations in check. To do some good, try **Union & Fifth** ([unionandfifth.com](http://unionandfifth.com)), a nonprofit online consignment shop that donates 75 percent of the sale to the charity of your choice.

### Diapers ...

Junior had a growth spurt right after you bought a 100-pack of size 3s—help! Many diaper banks prefer cash donations to actual diapers themselves. But some cities have drop-off locations and even accept open packages. Email [info@diaperbanknetwork.org](mailto:info@diaperbanknetwork.org) for locations; if there isn't one near you, call a local women's shelter.

## E

### EXPIRED CANNED GOODS ...

If a can is dented, bulging, or leaking, compost or throw away the food and recycle the can. Otherwise, the contents are likely still edible long past the sell-by date. According to the USDA, low-acid goods like soups are fine for up to five years after.

### EYEGLASSES ...

Donate old specs or shades to places that redistribute them overseas to those in need. Many Walmart stores with vision centers collect them to send to **Lions Clubs**; you can also mail them to **New Eyes** ([new-eyes.org](http://new-eyes.org)).



### FUR COATS ...

Put one on consignment in the fall at a local vintage store or furrier, or, if it's less than 20 years old, try the online seller **Buymyfur.com**. (But unless it's a name brand like Blackglama, or a natural color—not dyed—don't expect to get much.) If Grandma had a taste for big cat or bear, selling is a no-go because of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Donate by mail to **Born Free USA** from September through December; the fur will be reused as bedding for sick animals in animal sanctuaries ([bornfreeusa.org](http://bornfreeusa.org)).

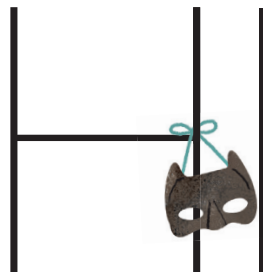
### FURNITURE ...

First, figure out if your piece is worth anything. If you think it might sell for more than a thousand dollars, or you have multiple items, hire an appraiser to get an estimate; search for one by zip code using the **American Society of Appraisers'** website ([appraisers.org](http://appraisers.org)). If you have a valuable antique, sell it through a dealer or at auction. Otherwise, consider these online marketplaces, which generally work on commission: For high-end vintage pieces, try **Chairish**, which interior designers use to move extra inventory; the site is highly selective and therefore gets good traffic ([chairish.com](http://chairish.com)). NYC and D.C. residents can use **AptDeco**, which handles pickup and delivery ([aptdeco.com](http://aptdeco.com)), something that other options like **Craigslist** ([craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org)) and **Krrb** ([krrb.com](http://krrb.com)) won't. If your furniture is less valuable but in good shape, donate it (see Rugs, page 122, or Donate in One Stop, page 123).



### Gift Cards for Places You Never Go

Aunt Mildred has had you pegged as a Forever 21 girl since high school, and you've got a stack of plastic to prove it. Trade it in for cash at sites like [cardcash.com](http://cardcash.com) or [cardpool.com](http://cardpool.com), or go to your local **Coinstar Exchange** kiosk (but make sure it accepts the card you want to trade first; go to [coinstar.com](http://coinstar.com)).



### HALLOWEEN COSTUMES

When your daughter retires her Rey or Elsa getup, mail the clean, gently used costume to **Ween Dream**, which distributes to children living in poverty, with special needs or disabilities, or recovering from trauma, like a national disaster ([weendream.org](http://weendream.org)).

### Income-Tax Returns

If your filing cabinet is bursting with W-2 statements, Kelly Phillips Erb, a tax attorney in Chester County, Pennsylvania, who goes by "Taxgirl" online, can help. The general rule to remember is the statute of limitations, which is three years, Erb says, "unless you're a cheater, as I joke to my clients." But seriously, fraud or underreporting income by 25 percent or more means you're open to audit for longer. Here's the 411 on your 1040s and other important docs.

- **Federal income taxes:** Most people need to keep only the past three years on hand. You can even keep papers electronically, as long as they're legible and accessible, so that you can supply them all in an organized fashion to the IRS if necessary. (For state and local taxes, the statute of limitations varies.)

- **Stocks and mutual funds:** For tax purposes, keep records that show the initial sale price and adjustments for as long as you own that stock and up until three years past the day you sell, gift, or donate it. If you don't, the IRS may assume your purchase price was zero and charge capital gains on the full amount, instead of just what you

earned. The good news: You only need to keep the year-end statement from your brokerage house, Erb suggests, not the updates in between, as long as it contains all purchases, sales, and income earned.

- **Real-estate records:** Keep original purchase information and receipts for upgrades and renovations for as long as you own a property.

- **Medical receipts:** Most people don't need to keep these for tax reasons. Unless you itemize your taxes and also spend more than 10 percent of your adjusted gross income on medical expenditures, you can't deduct these expenses.

## J JEWEL CASES FOR CDs...

So you've finally consolidated your college-era music in a binder. Technically, you can recycle the hard clear cases with the rest of your plastics. But if you think you'll ever want to sell those '90s gems (see Videotapes, page 123), keep the cases, along with the mini album sleeves.



## JEWELRY...

If your trinkets and watches are worth something, check out **True Facet**, a site where you can either list pieces for sale or they'll be sold for you on consignment—the company sends you a mailing label and takes care of photography and shipping ([truefacet.com](http://truefacet.com)). Alternatively, you can donate gems and gold to charities like the Christian organization **Samaritan's Purse** ([samaritanspurse.org](http://samaritanspurse.org)) or most of the big charities (see Donate in One Stop, page 123). Just make sure to get your pieces appraised according to IRS rules if you itemize deductions.

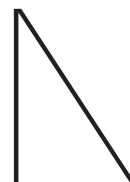
## L Lightbulbs

How many people does it take to change a lightbulb? One very resourceful one. CFLs (compact fluorescents) and other fluorescent bulbs contain small amounts of mercury, so it's best to recycle them. Lots of hardware stores, including many **Home Depot** and **IKEA** stores, have drop-off areas. Since some can accept only certain types of bulbs, check before you bring. Otherwise, look into your local household hazardous-waste policies: Most municipalities have periodic collection days. Incandescent, LED, and halogen bulbs can all legally be put in the trash, since they don't contain hazardous materials, but you get bonus points for recycling them with fluorescents where you can.



## Makeup...

Don't pitch that old lipstick—some cosmetics contain small amounts of lead and other chemicals that can leach into the ground in a landfill. First, ask your local waste management what might be considered hazardous household waste (flammable items like nail polish and remover are other examples). Clean and rinse out containers and recycle what you can. One easy option: Origins stores accept empty containers from any brand for recycling.



## NUTS & BOLTS

Donate workbench extras to **Habitat for Humanity ReStore** ([habitat.org/restores](http://habitat.org/restores)). Rusty nails? Scrap-metal yards will often buy them for pennies on the pound. Wrap up the rest so they don't cut anyone, and recycle with metals.

## Mattresses...

Most charities won't take ones with stains or tears, but if yours is in good condition, they might send a truck for it (see Donate in One Stop, page 123). If you're buying a replacement, the company bringing the new one will often take the old one away (though it might charge a small fee). Otherwise, check with local waste management for scheduled bulk-pickup days.

## Medicine...

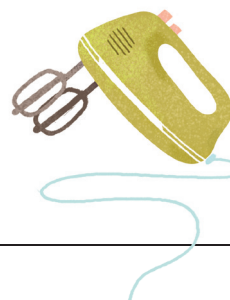
Check the label: It may tell you if you should dispose of the medication by flushing it down the toilet. (This is the case for ones containing strong painkillers like fentanyl or morphine, for example.) But flushing isn't the best method for most drugs, because they can contaminate the water supply and affect fish and wildlife. For those meds, law-enforcement agencies sponsor "take-back" days or supply drop-off boxes. You can also mix medication with kitty litter or coffee grounds (to prevent animals from eating it), seal it in a plastic bag, and toss it—but scratch off personal information from the prescription bottles first. If you use needles for medical purposes (insulin or hormone injections, say), see if your pharmacy will take back used ones for safe disposal.

## OILS, LEFTOVER COOKING

Surprising, but true: You may be able to reuse them multiple times if you strain out food bits and store them in a cool, dry place. How many times depends on several factors, including the type of oil and what you fried in it. If it starts to look dirty or smell rancid, discard by funneling it (after letting it cool to room temperature) into a container and throwing it away. Don't pour it down the drain, where it can solidify and clog the pipes.

## Kitchen Appliances

An old toaster or blender that still works can be donated (see Donate in One Stop, page 123). If you have small appliances that are broken and not worth fixing—we're lookin' at you, ye olde electric can opener—a local repair shop might take them for free to use for parts. Otherwise, dispose of these items as you would electronics: Look for e-waste rules in your area to see if you can recycle, and use [earth911.com](http://earth911.com) to find a location.





## P

## PACKING MATERIALS...

You love shopping online, but you don't love the box and all that filler. Reuse air pillows or bubble wrap, or pop and recycle them with your grocery bags and other flexible plastic. (If your town doesn't accept them for recycling, you'll find bins at most grocery stores.) And once you get staticky packing peanuts (official name: expanded polystyrene, or EPS) off your clothes and hands, see if your local shipping store takes them, or find your closest EPS recycling location by calling (we're not kidding) the **Peanut Hotline** (800-828-2214). If you use a meal-delivery service, snip a corner off the cold packs, drain the gel in the trash, and recycle the bag.

## PAINTS...

Nine states plus Washington, D.C., have recycling programs for leftovers; find drop-off locations at **paintcare.org**. Plan B: Donate at **Habitat for Humanity**, or a community theater that can use them to paint sets. Otherwise, dry out latex and acrylic paint—leave tops off for small amounts, or if you have a lot, pour in sand or kitty litter to absorb it—and throw it away after it dries. Oil-based paints are considered household hazardous waste; check with your municipality for collection days.

R  
Rugs

The **Salvation Army** and **Goodwill** take large home furnishings, including gently used area rugs, but check with the location near you, as some prefer large ones only. If your item is too soiled to donate, contact your waste management for details on bulk pickup. (For information on selling rugs, see Furniture, page 120.)

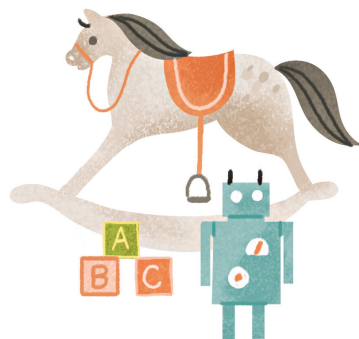
## S

## SPORTS EQUIPMENT



Trade in too-small hockey skates or skis for the right size at **Play It Again Sports**, which has locations in most states ([playitagainsports.com](http://playitagainsports.com)). It takes adult and kid gear, as well as big items like soccer goals. Treadmills, ellipticals, and the like can be sold—the retailer **2nd Wind** buys used items and has locations in 11 states ([2ndwindexercise.com](http://2ndwindexercise.com)). But they don't hold their value well, so if your equipment is in good shape, consider donating it to **Fitness 4 Charity**, which gives exercise equipment to schools and rehab centers ([fitnessforcharity.org](http://fitnessforcharity.org)). **Goodwill** and the **Salvation Army** often accept working equipment too.

## T



## TELEMARKETERS...

You've signed up for the **National Do Not Call Registry**, but you still get bugged during dinner ([donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov)). Now what? "As an etiquette expert, I can't tell you to hang up on someone," says Diane Gottsman of the Protocol School of Texas. However, "telemarketers are often on a script, and trained to keep going at all costs. So say, 'Please take me off your list. Thank you.' And hang up."

## TOYS...

Vintage toys, Lego sets with no pieces missing, Star Wars action figures in pristine condition—certain categories of used toys sell well if you take the time to post them with multiple photos and detailed descriptions on **Amazon**, **eBay**, or **Facebook** selling channels. Yeah, right. The rest of us can donate toys in good condition to the charities that take most items (see Donate in One Stop, page 123).

## U

## UMBRELLAS

It's not easy to disassemble a broken one to recycle the parts, but if you're determined, you can find instructions online. Before you go there, check the brand's website to see if it offers a lifetime warranty; if so, ship it back to return it or receive a replacement. Or pull a MacGyver: If a fabric loop has come off the edge, sew it back on. If one of the rivets on a rib has come apart, thread through a bit of wire to hold it together.

## Q

## Quilts, Comforters, Towels

Many animal shelters accept donations of old blankets and towels to use for bedding or cleanup. Use the **Shelter Pet Project** to contact a local shelter ([theshelterpetproject.org](http://theshelterpetproject.org)), or the **Humane Society** to ask what it needs ([humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org)).

# V

## VIDEOTAPES, DVDs, CDs, VIDEO GAMES...

If you've waited this long to get rid of your VHS tapes, now you'll have to suffer the consequences. They're not easily recyclable; check with an e-waste recycler (see Cell Phones, page 119) to see if it'll accept them.

Or you can mail them to **GreenDisk**, which destroys the contents and recycles them for a fee ([greendisk.com](http://greendisk.com)).

You're in better shape when it comes to CDs, DVDs, and video games: Sell them on Decluttr ([decluttr.com](http://decluttr.com)). You need a minimum of 10 items as well as original artwork and CD cases, but it'll pay for just about anything in good condition—maybe even *The Hangover Part III*.

## VIRUSES ON COMPUTERS...

One of the newest threats is ransomware, a kind of malware that takes your computer hostage. Don't pay up; there's no guarantee you'll get your files back, and then the bad guys win. Step 1: Shut down your computer to disconnect from the internet (which might help prevent malware from spreading or transmitting your private data). Step 2: If you regularly back it up, restore your default settings and reinstall your software (or have this done at a repair shop). There isn't a solution to every virus, but **No More Ransom!** can help get rid of some for free ([nomore-ransom.org](http://nomore-ransom.org)).

# W

## Wedding Dresses...

In addition to local wedding consignment shops, a few websites specialize in reselling gowns, either for a set fee or a percentage of the sale price: Try **Still White** ([stillwhite.com](http://stillwhite.com)), **PreOwnedWeddingDresses.com**, or **Tradesy** ([tradesy.com](http://tradesy.com)); **Once Wed** ([oncedwed.com](http://oncedwed.com)) is free. If you want to donate, **Brides Across America** distributes to military brides ([bridesacrossamerica.com](http://bridesacrossamerica.com)). Send details about your dress (ideally, it's less than five years old), and if they can use it, they'll send you shipping information. **Cherie Amour**, a bridal resale boutique in Maryland, accepts bridal, bridesmaids', and mother-of-the-bride dresses to resell, then channels the proceeds to support **Success in Style**, which provides business clothes to disadvantaged job seekers ([successinstyle.org](http://successinstyle.org)). **Adorned in Grace** ([adornedingrace.org](http://adornedingrace.org)), in Portland, Oregon, uses proceeds to fight sex trafficking.

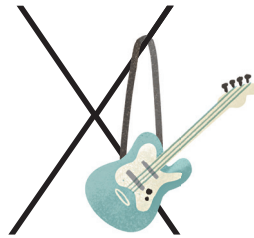


## Winter Coats...

Use the zip-code finder at **One Warm Coat** to learn where to donate year-round ([onewarmcoat.org](http://onewarmcoat.org)).

## Wraps, Food...

Aluminum foil can be recycled if food residue is cleaned off. Wax paper cannot, but you might be able to drop off newspaper sleeves and dry-cleaner bags wherever you take grocery bags.



## Xylophones, Clarinets, Flutes...

Professional (or dedicated) musicians have their own places to buy and sell instruments, like **Reverb**, but if you're dusting off your childhood sax or viola, stick to **eBay** or **Craigslist**, or donate to a school through the **Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation** ([mhopus.org](http://mhopus.org)). Pianos and other large instruments are trickier. Some **Salvation Army** locations will send a vehicle to pick up (check at [satruck.org](http://satruck.org)), but most charities take only known brands. See if a local school or place of worship needs one, or go online to sell it.

# Y

## Yoga Mats

Not to put a downer in your downward dog, but your trusty old purple mat might not be Earth-friendly. Many yoga mats are made from PVC, a durable, nasty kind of plastic that is tricky to recycle. "Try giving it to a yoga studio for new students," says Fay Wolf, author of *New Order: A Decluttering Handbook for Creative Folks (And Everyone Else)* (Ballantine, 2016), or get creative. Gardening knee pads, anyone?

# +

## DONATE IN ONE STOP

- **Donation Town** is a great all-purpose resource. Type in your zip code and it'll connect you to organizations that will pick up from your home ([donationtown.org](http://donationtown.org)).
- **Goodwill** has more than 3,000 locations in North America, but it's made up of a network of autonomous, community-based organizations with varying policies. In general, they take most things, from clothing and toys to furniture and housewares, and may send a truck to pick up large items. Revenue goes toward causes like job training, child care, and mentoring ([goodwill.org](http://goodwill.org)).
- **Habitat for Humanity ReStores** accept new or gently used construction materials, large furniture, and working appliances. They sell the items and use the proceeds to help communities around the world ([habitat.org/restores](http://habitat.org/restores)).
- **The Salvation Army** takes anything it can sell in its roughly 1,400 U.S. stores, including clothing, large appliances, mattresses, computers, bicycles, and cars. The money raised helps support its work, which includes food distribution and disaster relief ([salvationarmyusa.org](http://salvationarmyusa.org)).
- **Vietnam Veterans of America** has drop-off locations in most states and may pick up clothing, housewares, tools, books, bedding, curtains, and small appliances ([vva.org](http://vva.org)).

# Z

## ZOOM LENSES

If your phone camera is so good that you've retired your SLR, try selling it to **B&H**, which will give you a quote by email or phone ([bhphotovideo.com](http://bhphotovideo.com)). Or donate it (and any unused 35-millimeter film) to a college or high school photography class. Recycle broken equipment with other e-waste (see Cell Phones, page 119).