

Six household items and how to sell, donate or dump them

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In the winter months, we spend a lot of time indoors looking at stuff and thinking we really should get rid of it.

The heirloom piano, college novels, drawer of dead cellphones, your grandmother's flowered china — everyone's got something extra lying around. But it's hard to take that first step in the clutter-purging process. That's because, as any professional organizer will tell you, clutter is filled with emotion. Making the decision to get rid of something can be difficult; then you have to determine the best plan to make it happen. What is it really worth? Where is the best place to donate it? Will anyone else even want it? There are so many options today: [Craigslist](#), [eBay](#), [Freecycle](#), charity donation trucks, consignment stores, auctions and yard sales.

Here's some advice from six professional organizers about how to sell, donate, dump or recycle six major categories of household stuff: china, rugs, books, furniture, technology and musical instruments.

[Even ore ways to sell, donate, dump or recycle household items](#)

Have more suggestions for ways to sell, donate or trash your stuff? [E-mail us](#).

[Tips from professional organizer Scott Roewer](#)

BOOKS

Washingtonians love books. Many homes have multiple bookcases jammed with novels, biographies and cookbooks, plus more books stashed elsewhere. "A lot of people feel books are important to keep and have a lot of value for educational purposes. Books don't have an expiration date and can always be reread," says [Rachel Rosenthal Strisik](#), a Bethesda professional organizer.

First, Strisik helps clients go through their books and style their bookcases so they look better. After the family members have sorted out the books that are meaningful to them, she gently encourages a weeding-out. "I tell people that there are others who could really use those books, especially children's books," says Strisik, owner of the organizing firm Rachel and Company.



•Sell

For selling books, Strisik recommends two local places: Second Story Books and Riverby Books. Second Story Books owner Allan Stypeck advises customers to check his store's Web site (www.secondstorybooks.com) for an idea of the kind of books it buys and whether they have enough to justify one of his buyers making a house call. The store is mainly looking for books on academic and professional subjects and art history, science and classics, as well as rare books. It's best to call first. Second Story has two locations: 2000 P St. NW in Washington and 12160 Parklawn Dr. in Rockville, and it also sells through online book sites.

You can bring books to sell to its two Riverby Books locations. They are interested in odd and unusual tomes, but also stock everyday reading. Employees will make you an offer for books they are interested in on the spot. The stores (www.riverbybooks.com) are located at 417 E. Capitol St. SE in Washington and 805 Caroline St. in Fredericksburg.

•Donate

Strisik suggests [Books for America](#) and [Goodwill of Greater Washington](#). Check the organizations' Web sites for details on drop-offs and pickups. Check with your local library, too.

•Trash

If books have signs of mold or water damage or if pages are ripped out, Strisik says it's probably best to toss them.

CHINA

Many people have some sort of emotional attachment to the sets of china stacked in their cupboards. "Dishes are tough to get rid of," says [Deb Lee](#), a professional organizer whose firm, D. Allison Lee, is based in Upper Marlboro. "Dishes often have been passed on by a relative who loved and used them for years. Even if someone thinks the dishes are ugly and never uses them, it's still hard to give them away."



Today's more casual lifestyles rarely require fancy soup tureens or sugar bowls and creamers in fussy patterns. Lee gently encourages her clients to let that kind of china go. If they are hesitant, she suggests keeping one platter as a memento. Or, they can set one final festive table with the entire collection and take a photo. "It's the china's last big hurrah, and then you can move on," Lee says.

•Sell

Selling vintage china in consignment shops or on Craigslist takes a lot of effort and might not yield major profits, Lee says, unless it's still a desirable pattern. Lee suggests checking out Replacements Ltd. (www.replacements.com), a North Carolina-based buyer and seller of new and old dinnerware, or the International Association of Dinnerware Matchers (www.iadm.com). In both cases, you are responsible for packing, shipping and insuring, which is time-consuming and can be costly.

•Donate

Lee's favorite idea is to offer the set to family or friends. Hopefully, someone will be thrilled to get it, and you'll feel great passing it along to a household where it will be cherished. If you donate, many charities or church bazaars will be happy to accept your dishes.

•Trash

Don't discard dishes unless they have bad cracks, chips or stains. Give them away.

FURNITURE

Selling furniture that is not antique, a brand name or in great condition is not that easy, according to Sally Reinholdt, a professional organizer with [Commonwealth Organizing Solutions](#) in Alexandria. You can generally find someone to come and take away something in decent shape for free on Craigslist or Freecycle or your neighborhood e-mail list. Today, an army of chalk painters are looking for beat-up tables and chests to rehab. But Reinholdt says clients often have an inflated view of what their used furniture is worth.



•Sell

The simplest way to sell a Pottery Barn sofa or something of similar provenance is to post a photo on Craigslist or another online site, Reinholdt says. If you have solid wood furniture, you could sell it, consign it or learn how to repurpose it through the Front Porch (www.frontporchfurniturerescue.com) in Falls Church. If you have an antique or mid-century piece, you might consult a local auction or a vintage or antique store. Consignment stores also are a possibility.

●Donate

The [Northern Virginia Family Service](#) shops accept donations of small furniture. Reinholdt also recommends [Donation Nation](#), which helps remove, recycle and redistribute unwanted items including furniture and will pick up at your house. They charge a removal fee, but they do their best to recycle and not fill up landfills.

●Trash

Post on [Freecycle](#) or another Web site or call for bulk pickup in your municipality.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

[Helen Long](#), a professional organizer in Falls Church and a director of [Partners Estate Sales](#), says many families have pianos, violins or clarinets that they no longer use. “We have found harpsichords and harps and many instruments that have sentimental value,” she says. They might be leftover band instruments from children now grown, or a relative’s collection of accordions.

Long works with [Quinn’s Auction Galleries](#) in Falls Church, a company that has experience in selling musical instruments from local estates. “You want to begin to ask yourself, ‘What was the reason I owned this object — was it my high school trumpet?’ And if so, it will probably be somebody else’s high school trumpet or scrap metal,” says Matthew Quinn, executive vice president. “If it was a violin that belonged to a musically gifted uncle and is from a noted maker, then you need to do research and consult with a specialist.”

Long most frequently deals with pianos and organs. “They are the most common instruments we find, and the biggest,” she says. They take up a lot of space but aren’t easy to get rid of sentimentally or physically.

●Sell

Get a professional appraisal or consult with an auction house. Check with a local music store to see whether they sell used instruments. [The Potter Violin Co.](#) in Bethesda can provide appraisals and also sells some violins, violas, cellos and basses on consignment. Craigslist is often a good place to connect with an instrument buyer, she says.

●Donate

Instruments are often gladly received by school music departments, churches or retirement homes. Donating a piano is a bit more difficult because moving one costs hundreds of dollars, with additional charges for lots of steps, and often you will be responsible for those charges in order to have an organization accept your donation. Long suggests these piano movers: [Express Moving & Storage](#) for uprights or [Potter Piano Movers](#) for uprights, grands, baby grands, consoles and organs.

●Trash

Instruments in bad condition probably won’t be sellable (though you might still be able to give them away). Again the real problem item is the piano: A moldy or damaged piano has no real value, and you’ll still have to hire someone to remove it.

RUGS



Many rolled-up rugs move from one house to another and are never used again. “People may love the rug but it’s often either too big or too small for their new place,” says Washington professional organizer Scott Roewer of [Solutions by Scott & Co](#). He often finds area rugs and runners stashed in storage areas and closets.



Many of his clients save large, bulky rolls of wall-to-wall carpeting they installed years ago. “Everyone thinks they might need it some day to replace a piece that was stained or ruined in a flood,” Roewer says. Wall-to-wall carpet tends to fade, and it won’t match what you have put aside; plus, if there’s a flood you’ll usually have to replace the entire carpeted area, anyway. Unfortunately, this kind of carpet is often stored in an out-of-the-way place such as a garage or basement utility room, where mice might get into it. “I’ve seen many rugs where mice have torn up the fibers and made them part of their nests,” Roewer says. He suggests keeping only a small square of extra carpeting, which could be used for patching a small section.

•Sell

Auction houses do well with good Oriental rugs. You might also consult with a local rug dealer or professional appraiser who specializes in Oriental or Persian rugs.

•Donate

[A Wider Circle](#) (www.awidercircle.org), which helps furnish homes for families in need, accepts small area rugs in good condition. You can also donate gently used rugs to [Amvets](#), [Goodwill](#) or the thrift shop run by the Montgomery County affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, [NAMI-MC](#) (www.namimc.org), Roewer says. Extra carpet rolls can be cut in squares and donated to animal shelters.

•Trash

If a rug has mold or has been heavily soiled by a pet, call for bulk pickup in your jurisdiction. Many rugs can also be recycled: Roewer suggests looking for guidance at www.earth911.com/recycling or www.carpetrecovery.org.

TECHNOLOGY

When professional organizer [Kim Oser](#) arrives at a client’s home, she asks for the location of the family’s computer graveyard. “It’s often a closet in the home office or a place in the basement where old desktops, a laptop or two, some flip phones, some old-generation tablets and lots of old cords have been banished,” Oser says.



Oser, whose Gaithersburg business is [Need Another You](#), says that consumers are constantly upgrading technology but not discarding the obsolete. Many are afraid of the consequences of someone obtaining personal information stored on their devices and are confused about how to safely dispose of them.

•Sell

Oser often recommends www.gazelle.com, a consumer electronics trade-in site that buys used gadgets. If you decide to sell, you should back up whatever information you have stored on the device. Then go online or into your settings to find out how to do a factory restore to remove personal information. In addition, Gazelle promises to remove all data from each device by following manufacturer guidelines to do a factory reset and remove and destroy the SIM card (where applicable). When selling, provide original cords and chargers if possible.

•Donate

Some charities and schools will take old computers or phones, but most want working components. If you have an old cellphone to unload, try www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com.

●Trash

Broken computers typically don't have any resale value and might contain environmental hazards, Oser says. To safely dispose of them, take out the hard drive, delete everything or do a system restore. Check with your local jurisdiction's public works department about where to bring unwanted electronic equipment so that it can be recycled.