

FROM CLUTTER TO CLARITY:

A DOWNSIZING GUIDE TO
YOUR BEST MOVE YET

Simplify Your Space.
Embrace a New Chapter.



Introduction:

A New Chapter Awaits

Downsizing your home is more than just a move—it's a fresh start. Whether you're transitioning to a smaller home, a retirement community, or simply looking for a lower-maintenance lifestyle, this guide will help you navigate the process with confidence and ease.

Many homeowners feel overwhelmed at the thought of sorting through years (or even decades) of belongings. If you're wondering, "where do I even start?" you're not alone. But with the right plan, downsizing doesn't have to feel stressful—it can actually be liberating!

In this guide, we'll cover:

- ✓ How to sort your belongings with confidence
- ✓ What to keep, donate or discard
- ✓ Ways to preserve memories without keeping everything
- ✓ How to prepare your home for a top-dollar sale
- ✓ Where to donate or sell items
- ✓ Stress-free packing and moving strategies

Let's take it step by step and make your downsizing journey **smooth, successful, and even enjoyable!**

Step 1: Decluttering with Purpose

Before you can sell your home, you'll need to pare down your belongings—but that doesn't mean getting rid of everything. The key is to be intentional about what stays and what goes.

The "Keep, Donate, Discard" Method

One of the simplest ways to declutter is to use three categories for every item in your home:

- **KEEP** – Items that are essential, regularly used or deeply meaningful.
- **DONATE/SELL** – Items in good condition that someone else can use.
- **DISCARD** – Broken, outdated, or unnecessary items that serve no purpose.



Additional Tips:

- ✓ **Start Small:** Instead of tackling the whole house at once, begin with a low-sentiment area like a guest room, linen closet, or pantry. This helps build momentum.
- ✓ **Use a Timer:** Set a 30-minute timer and focus on just one section of a room. When time's up, take a break or keep going if you're in the zone!
- ✓ **One-Year Rule:** If you haven't used or needed an item in the past year, chances are you won't miss it.

Step 2: Making Thoughtful Decisions About What to Keep



When you've lived in a home for many years, everything can feel important. But not everything needs to come with you. Here's how to decide:



💡 **Keep What You Love & Use:** If an item makes your daily life easier or brings you joy, it deserves a place in your next home.

💡 **Be Realistic About Space:** Will that oversized sectional fit in your new living room? If not, consider selling or donating it.

💡 **Ditch the "Just in Case" Mentality:** Holding onto things "just in case" often leads to clutter. Be honest with yourself about what you truly need.

✂ **Tip:** Struggling with sentimental items? Try taking a photo of the object before letting it go. This way, you keep the memory without the clutter!



STEP 3: Preserving Memories Without Keeping Everything

Letting go of certain belongings doesn't mean losing the memories attached to them. Here are a few ways to honor your past while embracing the future:

 **Digitize Photos & Documents** – Scan old photos, letters, and important paperwork to keep them without the bulk.

 **Pass Down Family Heirlooms** – Give meaningful items to loved ones who will cherish them.

 **Create a Memory Scrapbook** – Take photos of sentimental items and make a keepsake album with stories behind them.

 **Curate a Small "Memory Box"** – Choose a few special items to keep in a designated box, rather than holding onto everything.

STEP 4:

Preparing Your Home for Sale While Downsizing



As you sort through your belongings, it's important to prepare your home to attract the best possible offers. The goal is to create a space that feels inviting, spacious, and move-in ready for buyers.

Decluttering vs. Staging: What's the Difference?

Decluttering helps you eliminate excess items, while staging is about arranging what's left to highlight your home's best features.



WHERE TO FOCUS FIRST:

- ✓ **Clear surfaces** – Remove extra décor, piles of papers and excess furniture to create open spaces.
- ✓ **Neutralize** – Put away highly personal items (family photos, niche collectibles) so buyers can imagine themselves in the space.
- ✓ **Enhance curb appeal** – First impressions matter! Trim the lawn, freshen up mulch and add a welcoming touch (like a seasonal wreath or potted plants by the front door).
- ✓ **Prioritize simple fixes** – Fresh paint, updated lighting and small repairs can go a long way.

STEP 5:

Where to Donate, Sell, or Repurpose Items

Where to Donate

- ✓ **Mercy Mall** – Accepts kitchen items and clothing in excellent condition.
- ✓ **Habitat for Humanity ReStore** – Perfect for furniture, appliances, and building materials.
- ✓ **Goodwill** – Accepts clothing, small furniture, and household goods.



Hiring the Right Moving Help

- 🚚 **A full-service moving company** – Handles packing, transport, and unpacking.
- 🚛 **A moving truck rental** – If you're DIY-ing with family or friends.
- 📦 **Downsizing specialist** – Cut the Clutter RVA helps downsizers with organization and moving transitions.



6 Weeks Prior to Your Move



Research Moving Companies

- Check out customer reviews
- Get at least three quotes
- Determine your budget
- You do not have to decide on a company now
- but you do want to research your options

Start Collecting Moving Boxes

- Call your local grocery and drug stores to see if they have any free boxes
- Save your Amazon boxes
- If you plan ahead, there is a good chance you can get most of what you need without spending a dime

Plan Your Packing

- Determine how you will label your boxes (e.g., “Kitchen: Dishes” or “Office: Books”)
- Consider using a color coding system
- See packing tips pages 13-15

Reserve a Storage Unit

- If you need to use a storage unit because you shipped your items a few weeks in advance or must wait for people to move out of your new home, take the opportunity to reserve space now

Take A Picture of Belongings

- Taking photos of your valuable belongings will protect you if you have to file a claim
- Plan to take photos of items as you begin to pack-it can trim time off of the unpacking process
- Plan to take pictures of electronics and matching cords before you disassemble

Prior to Your Move

Preparing for a move involves careful planning and organization to ensure a smooth transition. Start by creating a comprehensive moving checklist and timeline to keep track of tasks.



Decide on a Moving Company

Finalize your budget, review your quotes, and book a mover. Remember to keep all of your receipts and important dates in your moving binder.



Get Moving Insurance

With any luck, nothing will be broken or damaged by the time you get to your new home. Just in case, though, you may want to opt for moving coverage to protect your belongings. Your mover's liability for lost or damaged goods will not equal their replacement cost. You may also want to have valuable items appraised.



Make Travel Arrangements

Plan your travel itinerary and make transportation/lodging reservations in advance if traveling to your new home.

*Be sure to leave an itinerary copy with friends or family.



Buy Packing Supplies

Now is the time to buy any boxes, tape, and other moving supplies. Your move can feel 10 times easier if you get all the supplies you need up front.



Refine Your Packing Plan

Make a plan of action and begin labeling boxes according to your system. Save time with your box labeling by picking up a sheet of different colored stickers and assigning each room a color. That way, you will be able to identify what needs to go where quickly and you won't have to hunt for the marker every single time you seal a box.



Keep Your Receipts

Remember that some moving expenses are tax-deductible (if the move is employment-related), so you will want to save your moving expense receipts for tax deductions, including meals, lodging, and gasoline. Record expenses incurred during your house-hunting trips.

2 WEEKS

Prior to Your Move



Contact Your Utility Companies

Contact the following to arrange for services for your new home/coordinate with previous owner:

- ☐ Home Security Providers
- ☐ Internet and Phone
- ☐ Trash
- ☐ Cable TV
- ☐ Utilities (Gas, Electric, Water)



Notify Others of Your New Address

- ☐ Charge Accounts & Subscriptions
- ☐ National & Alumni Organizations
- ☐ Past Employers (for W-2 purposes)
- ☐ Post Office
- ☐ Relatives & Friends
- ☐ Retirement Account Info
- ☐ Save your old address labels to speed up filling out any change-of-address forms



Confirm Moving Dates

- ☐ Confirm important moving dates with any companies you have booked services through (these should already be in your moving binder). Now you just need to verify everything is still scheduled as planned.



Begin Packing

- ☐ You should have your inventory completed, your boxes collected and labeled, and your valuables identified
- ☐ Now it's time to do the actual packing



Plan Your Meals

- ☐ Remember, almost all of your items will be in boxes
- ☐ Bookmark your favorite takeout menus
- ☐ Grab a few frozen items from the grocery store
- ☐ Leave a few essentials unpacked so you can still do a bit of home cooking



Schedule Sitters

- ☐ Schedule a babysitter, pet sitter, or both
- ☐ Make arrangements to have your kids and pets entertained - or at least out of the way - while you are loading the truck



Plan A Moving Party

- ☐ Invite - or beg - your family and friends to help you move

1 Week Prior to Your Move

Checklist

- ☐ **Re-confirm moving company or rental truck.** You will want to make sure everything is scheduled as planned.
- ☐ **Notify all of your utilities for your current home:** gas, electric, water, cable, and phone of your disconnection date (recommend the day AFTER closing).
- ☐ **Disassemble big furniture items.** It will save a ton of time if you break down large furniture items like bed frames, sectional couches, and bookshelves before the movers arrive.
- ☐ **Pack your suitcases.** Have a suitcase packed for everyone in the family that they can live out of for a few days. Pack essential items like pajamas, comfy outfits for unpacking boxes, toiletries, etc.
- ☐ **Begin cleaning empty rooms.** Your home will need to be in clean condition before turning over the keys.
- ☐ **Collect all keys and garage door openers.** Collect all keys and garage door openers. You will need to hand these over to the real estate agent, new owner, or next tenants when you move out.
- ☐ **Secure your important documents.** Collect all important documents such as passports, birth certificates, marriage license, photo IDs, etc. and designate a safe place for transport.
- ☐ **Take pictures or video of your empty home.** You want to be able to prove your house was in good condition when you moved out.
- ☐ **Get Cash.** You will want some cash on hand to tip movers and deal with unexpected needs or emergencies.
- ☐ **Schedule a final walk-through of your new home.** Make sure you know how to find things like water heater, circuit breakers, and water shut-off values.
- ☐ **Finish packing before moving day.** One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to do your packing on loading day. Make sure everything is ready before your movers or rental truck arrives.

Moving DAY

Don't hit snooze!
This is definitely one
day when you want
to wake up on time.



1.

CLEAR A PATH

Make sure the people helping you move can get the boxes from your house to the moving truck without tripping over things.

2.

CHECK THE PAPERWORK

If you hired movers, make sure to ask for official paperwork from the movers to ensure their identity and that all the details of your move are what you expect. Do not get caught in a moving scam!

3.

BE AVAILABLE

Be there to facilitate the loading process. Stick around to answer any questions your movers may have. Be sure to provide your contact information and new address, especially if you need to leave while they work.

4.

ORDER PIZZA OR DONUTS

The best thing you can do for those helping you move is to have everything packed when they arrive. The second best thing you can do is feed them while they help. **Also, don't forget...it is customary to tip your movers.

5.

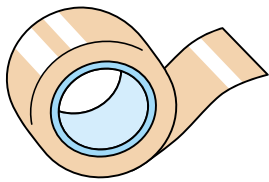
SIGN THE MOVER'S INVENTORY LIST

Be sure to ask the movers to give you a copy of their official inventory. This will be critical in case something "disappears" during transit and you have to file a claim.

Additional Checklist Items

SAVE YOURSELF TIME, STRESS, AND MONEY
BY PREPARING AHEAD OF TIME.

Transfer your bank accounts. Your new bank will be happy to open your account by mail or email.	Ask for professional referrals if available (e.g., doctor, accountant, etc.).
Request records from doctors and dentists, including eye-glass prescriptions, dental, x-rays, and vaccinations.	Make arrangements for transporting your pets and plants (see pages 18-19 for more details).
Pay existing bills and close out local charge accounts.	Draw a floor plan of where your furniture should be placed. This will help avoid confusion for you and your movers.
Transfer insurance policies or arrange for new policies.	Gather all valuables, jewelry, important papers (birth certificates, deeds, and documents) to take with you personally.
Cancel or transfer deliveries, newspapers, garbage collections, etc.	Arrange any special movers, that may be necessary: to move an expensive piano; to break down and move a pool table; or to relocate an above-ground swimming pool.
Check on personal items that might be at the photoshop, in a safe-deposit box, at a neighbor's house, on lay-away, or in a repair shop (e.g., shoe repair, jewelry store, small appliance repair, or dressmaker).	If you are doing a long distance move, pack an arrival kit of necessities just in case you arrive before your movers. *If applicable
Check with your attorney about your will if you are crossing state lines.	Obtain your children's school records to make for an easier transfer.



PACKING TIPS



Packing efficiently is key to a successful move.
Here are some essential tips to help you pack like a pro:

Carry all valuables with you. Do not pack jewelry, documents, coin/stamp collections, or anything that will be difficult to replace. The contents of a safety deposit box can be moved for you by your bank.	Label each box with its contents, which room it should go in, whether it is fragile, and whether it should be loaded last (so as to be unloaded first). This will help you and your movers know where every box belongs in your new place.
Use the right size boxes. Pack books and other heavy items in small boxes. Alternate bindings and wrap valuable books separately. Light items, like linens and pillows, can be packed in bigger boxes.	Use strong containers that are in good condition and can be secured tightly with twine or strapping tape. These can usually be purchased from your moving company, Amazon, home improvement stores, etc. Purchase special boxes for dishes, wardrobe, and other special items.
Do not load more than 50 pounds into any one box and make sure that the weight is evenly distributed.	Numbering each box and keeping an inventory list in your moving binder is a good way to keep track of what you have packed—it can also ensure that you have everything when you unpack.
Pack very light items (light clothing, linens, etc.) in drawers of nightstands, dressers, etc., but do not overload them.	When packing dishes, put packing paper around each dish, then wrap five or six together with more paper. Pack dishes on their sides, never flat. Use plenty of bunched-up paper or bubble wrap as padding. Use a box with cardboard dividers to help protect glasses.
Cushion contents with newspaper or other packing material to prevent breakage. Use newsprint paper or tissue paper for items that might be soiled. Towels and cloth napkins are great for wrapping fragile items.	Remove all breakables and liquids from drawers and pack them separately. Seal medicines and liquids to prevent leaking and pack them in a leak-proof bag or container.

More Packing Tips

ARTWORK & PICTURES

If you are moving expensive art, ask your mover about special crating. Understand exactly how to pack artwork for moving to keep it safe. You should never wrap oil paintings in regular paper; the paper will stick. When you pack pictures for moving, make an X with masking tape across the glass to strengthen it and to hold it together if it shatters. Then, wrap the pictures in paper or bubble wrap and put them in a frame box with a piece of cardboard between each framed piece for protection.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BOXES

- Put heavier items on the bottoms of boxes, lighter items on top. And if you are loading the truck yourself, pack your heaviest boxes first, toward the front of the truck, for balance.
- Leave your clothes on the hanger, group them, and wrap them in large garbage bags or hang them in a wardrobe box.
- Do not leave empty spaces in the boxes. Fill in gaps with clothing, towels, or packing paper. Movers often will not move boxes that feel loosely packed or unbalanced.
- Avoid mixing items from different rooms in the same box. It will make your packing quicker and your unpacking a lot easier, too.
- Tape your moving boxes well. Use a couple of pieces of tape to close the bottom and top seams. Then, use one of the movers' techniques—make a couple of wraps all the way around the box's top and bottom edges, where stress is concentrated.

Leave your clothes on the hanger, group them, and wrap them in large garbage bags or hang them in a wardrobe box.

Pro Tip:

Pack your suitcases. You can get away with packing heavy things in suitcases since their wheels make them easy to move. Use suitcases to pack things that aren't easily transported in boxes, such as books and heavy serving dishes.

Use pots to hold small items. Instead of wasting additional boxes for small kitchen items like spices and gadgets, fill your large pots and other sealable containers with them. You'll save a ton of space.

Wrap a small bit of plastic wrap around things that might spill. Prevent spills in transit by using plastic wrap to secure the lids of soap, shampoo, cleaning supplies, and other items you do not want poured out all over your things.

Almost Finished Packing

Doing the prep work ahead of time will save you headaches in the long run.

- While your TV and computer are still plugged in, take a picture of the back of them so you will remember how to set them up later. It can be difficult to remember where all of those wires go.
- Put together a moving essentials bag. Pack a small duffel bag or suitcase with the items you'll need access to during your move and right after you've arrived at your new place. This may include items, such as: important documents, medications, chargers, basic toiletries, first aid kit, a couple of changes of clothes, etc. See next page for comprehensive list.
- Leave out some basic cleaning supplies. Hopefully you've already done your deep clean, but even so, you should still keep basic cleaning supplies available for any unexpected touch ups. A broom, dustpan, and container of sanitizing wipes should be sufficient. Just like your essentials bag, keep your cleaning supplies somewhere separately so they won't get loaded onto the truck—your car or a closet should be fine. Once the boxes are cleared out and the space is empty you'll be able to see if any last-minute cleaning needs to get done.
- Remember to pack the things you use the most last.



Remember these things for moving day:

- On moving day pack a cooler. Stock a cooler with easy-to-grab items that can keep your strength up throughout the day, like water bottles and quick snacks. Move it with you in the car instead of the moving truck, so you can access it whenever you need to.
- Make sure your phone is fully charged. You probably won't have a lot of time to play games on your phone on moving day, but you should still be conscious of having a full charge. You never know if you might get lost on the way to your new place or need to coordinate timing with your movers. Keep your phone plugged in the night before your move. Store your phone charger in your essentials bag so in the event you do drain your battery, blasting your moving day playlist, you can easily charge it again.

MOVING DAY ESSENTIALS

FIRST NIGHT IN YOUR NEW HOME

THESE ARE MUST HAVES TO HELP YOU ENJOY YOUR FIRST NIGHT IN YOUR NEW HOME



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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Bedding | ☐ Clock | ☐ Acetaminophen/Ibuprofen |
| ☐ Handsoap | ☐ Pajamas | ☐ Essential Medications |
| ☐ Shower Liner | ☐ Shoes | ☐ First Aid Kit |
| ☐ Toilet Paper | ☐ Toiletries | ☐ Make-up, Lotions, Etc. |
| ☐ Towels | ☐ Work Clothes | ☐ Vitamins |



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|---|--|
| ☐ Pet Food & Medications | ☐ Waste baggies/ Litter Box |
| ☐ Pet Bed or Crate | ☐ Leash |
| ☐ Favorite toys & treats | ☐ Collar with ID Tag |
| ☐ Blanket or towel that smells like home | ☐ Bottled water and bowl |



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|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| ☐ Cups | ☐ Breakfast Foods | ☐ Bottle or Wine Opener |
| ☐ Napkins | ☐ Coffee, Filters, Mugs | ☐ Dish Soap |
| ☐ Paper Plates | ☐ Coffee Maker | ☐ Pet Food |
| ☐ Paper Towels | ☐ Snacks | ☐ Wash Rag or Towel |
| ☐ Silverwares | ☐ Dinner / Take-out Menu | |



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|---|--|
| ☐ Cleaning supplies | ☐ Flashlight |
| ☐ Disinfectant Wipes | ☐ Paper and pens |
| ☐ Rubber gloves | ☐ Permanent marker |
| ☐ Scissors & Tape | ☐ Phone chargers |
| ☐ Trash bags | ☐ Tools: screwdrivers (flat head and phillips head), hammer, pliers |



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|--|---|
| ☐ Checkbook | ☐ Birth certificate |
| ☐ Closing documents | ☐ Driver's license |
| ☐ HUD statements | ☐ Passport |
| ☐ Wallet | ☐ Social security card |

YOUR DOWNSIZING & MOVING TIMELINE

Creating a timeline for your downsizing & project helps bring clarity and makes the process more manageable, efficient and less overwhelming.

Your Estimated Moving Timeframe

11-12 MONTHS

Date:

☐ Assess each room in your home to make an overall plan.

☐ Set aside time on your calendar to tackle each space.

☐ Schedule a consultation to plan, make decisions, prepare your home for listing, pack and more.

☐ Begin to tackle cluttered areas that you might not have in your new home, like the garage, attic and shed.

9-10 MONTHS

Date:

☐ Start sorting and making decisions about your unwanted items.

☐ Sort items into piles: keep, donate, sell, gift to others, trash.

☐ Use colored painter's tape and assign each category a color. Create a color key.

☐ Begin researching Realtors who can advise you on repairs and other tasks related to listing your home.

7-8 MONTHS

Date:

☐ Research and schedule a consultation with a company to help you sell items of value.

☐ Make more decisions in the garage, attic and shed.

☐ Begin gathering packing supplies like boxes, bags, packing paper. You'll need more packing paper than you think!

☐ Begin making decisions on items you want to give to friends and family. Schedule time to hand off items.

5-6 MONTHS

Date:

☐ Start researching movers. Prepare a list of questions.

☐ Gather and make decisions on paperwork. If you need to hire a shred company, do your research.

☐ Begin gathering and making decisions about your memorabilia and photos. You've got this!

☐ Meet with friends and family to hand off items you're giving them.

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YOUR DOWNSIZING & MOVING TIMELINE

Your Estimated Moving Timeframe

3-4 MONTHS

Date:

- ☐ Start packing items you won't need before your move. Label boxes with contents and the destination room.
- ☐ To prep your house for listing, remove and pre-pack photos and personal items.
- ☐ Organize your closets and cabinets to prep for pictures.
- ☐ Schedule cleaners to shine up your home pre-listing and after you move out.

1-2 MONTHS

Date:

- ☐ Got a moving date? Book movers to pack, move and set-up your new home.
- ☐ Make decisions about your kitchen items. Pre-pack your infrequently used items that you plan to keep.
- ☐ Call or email utilities and other contacts with your move date and new address.
- ☐ Make plans for pets on moving day.

2 WEEKS

Date:

- ☐ Schedule junk removal to pick up trash and non-donatable items.
- ☐ Continue packing your living and bedroom spaces.
- ☐ Set a side a "do not pack" area for items you'll transport like liquids, jewelry, important documents, plants and more.
- ☐ Schedule cancellation of home services such as cable, WiFi and trash after closing day.

1 WEEK

Date:

- ☐ Finish packing.
- ☐ Confirm details with the movers, cleaners and other hired professionals.
- ☐ Gather moving day essentials like toiletries, medicines and key documents.
- ☐ Mark items with painter's tape to direct movers.

MOVING DAY

Date:

- ☐ Pack last minute items and begin unpacking at your new home.
- ☐ Pack your car with items that you're transporting to your new home.
- ☐ Conduct a final walkthrough of your house.
- ☐ Celebrate your new space!

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Hope George
REAL ESTATE

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REAL ESTATE



Looking Forward to a New Chapter

Downsizing isn't just about moving—it's about creating a lifestyle that gives you more freedom, ease, and joy.

- ✦ You're not losing memories—you're gaining freedom.
- ✦ You've made room for new experiences.
- ✦ Your home is now designed for your future needs.

You've done the hard work - now enjoy your next exciting chapter!



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IF YOUR HOME IS CURRENTLY LISTED, THIS IS NOT A SOLICITATION.
TOP 2% OF AGENTS IN CENTRAL VIRGINIA