Welcome to the WSU Asotin County Extension Newsletter!
This is a quarterly newsletter highlighting events and topics of interest to residents of Asotin County and the surrounding areas.
This newsletter can also be viewed on our website: extension.wsu.edu/asotin/

Contact Us

Office location: 135 2nd St, B107 in Asotin
(Basement of the Asotin County Courthouse)
* Masks are required in the courthouse
Hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 to 5:00
(closed 12:00 to 1:00)
Mailing address: PO Box 9, Asotin, WA 99402
Phone: 509-243-2009
Website: extension.wsu.edu/asotin

Mark Heitstuman, County Director
heitstuman@wsu.edu
mheitstuman@co.asotin.wa.us

Kim Belanger, 4-H Coordinator & Food $ense Educator
kim.belanger@wsu.edu
kbelanger@co.asotin.wa.us

Janice Reed, Office Manager
jreed@co.asotin.wa.us
janice.reed@wsu.edu

Washington State University helps people develop leadership skills and use research based knowledge to improve their economic status and quality of life.

Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension Office.
Congratulations to Brenna Keene

Washington State 4-H Youth of the Month

Brenna is a member of Animal Crackers 4-H club

Favorite part about 4-H: Brenna likes getting to work with animals and making new friends. She also loves getting to teach other people about animals.

Current issues you are passionate about: Climate change and the mental health crisis

School Activities: ASB President, Promoting Kindness and inclusivity.

Recent Service Project: Making a compliment tree in the school hallway

How do you inspire change: Writing to government officials about many topics, including climate change and the mental health crisis happening in schools.
4-H Scholarship Application
https://extension.wsu.edu/4h/youth/scholarship-opportunities/

WASHINGTON STATE 4-H SCHOLARSHIPS

Washington State 4-H scholarships are offered to encourage 4-H members to continue their education beyond high school. All five parts of the Washington State 4-H Scholarship application, listed below, are required to be considered for scholarships. Please read the instructions carefully.

ELIGIBILITY: Current Washington State 4-H members who are high school seniors or completing their GED are eligible to apply. Applicants must have accumulated at least 2 year of 4-H affiliation and currently in 4-H. Scholarship awards will be based on:
1. Compatibility to scholarship criteria.
2. Leadership and participation in 4-H as demonstrated through your essay and resume.
3. Community service.
4. Scholastic ability and achievement.

Required Parts of Your Application

Please write and gather all parts of the application before you fill out the on-line application. All components must be included with your application for your application to be considered complete. Put together into one document, your resume, essay, 2 letters of recommendation, and transcript, and save as one .pdf that you will attach to the on-line application.

1) Complete the Washington State 4-H Youth Scholarship Application – deadline March 15 (https://v2.4honline.com)

2) Resume - include the duration and extent of your involvement in 4-H, your leadership, roles and responsibilities, the size and scope of your project, time spent, community service, and what you accomplished individually or as part of a team. Also, include any non-4-H volunteerism and community involvement. Specify what is 4-H and what is non-4-H.

3) Essay – must be 2 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1” margins. Introduce yourself, including where you live, when and why you became involved in 4-H. Highlight your 4-H projects and activities, including major learning experiences, special interests, and achievements. Describe how 4-H has influence your decision of what two or four-year College you will be attending, what you plan to major in and plans for your future. Write about how your involvement in 4-H exemplifies each part of the “4-H pledge”, but do not just quote the 4-H pledge, what life skills 4-H provided you, how you will utilize them in the future, and how 4-H has affected your personal development. Describe non-4-H related involvement, employment, school, sports, youth, and community engagement.

4) Two Letters of Recommendation - one of which must be from an academic advisor, or school official on institution letterhead. One must be from someone who knows you personally and what you have accomplished (not a parent or relative).

5) Academic Transcript – include a copy of your high school transcript (unofficial is fine).

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS MARCH 15

Questions? Contact Britta Nitcy 509-335-6479 nitcy@wsu.edu
2022 Know Your Government

HAS LEVELED UP!

Students across Washington are invited to come together and learn about the legislative process through interactive programming!

Friendly competition will encourage engagement with real bills, real legislators and real civic-minded students across the state.

Participate in Zoom meetings with facilitators & delegates, hear from speakers and participate in challenges involving local & State governments!

Open to ALL 13 years old and up
Cost is $15 per participant
Get Started here:
https://sites.google.com/view/kyg-2022
Master Gardeners and Gardening

Become a Master Gardener
Asotin, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman, and Nez Perce Counties

For information contact:
WSU Asotin County Extension
janice.reed@wsu.edu
509-243-2009

2022 Master Gardener Training Class
Begins January 18

Horticulture class available to those who do not wish to be Master Gardeners

Registration deadline is January 7, 2021

- Tuesdays, 1 to 4 pm
- In person classes at Clarkston Campus of Walla Walla Community College
  1470 Bridge Street, Clarkston, WA
- Also offered via Zoom.
- Cost for classes is $130
- Online training course required to become a Master Gardener. Cost is $75.

Information and registration materials available at:
https://extension.wsu.edu/asotin/gardening/horticulture-classes-and-workshops/
Garden Resolutions for 2022
Adapted from Christy Bredenkamp, NCSU Macon County Extension

If you’re making a list of resolutions for 2022, don’t leave off your garden! Here’s a short list of resolutions you can make to improve your garden this year.

Resolution #1 Healthy Soil
Think about adding compost, manure or fertilizer to enrich your soil. Get a baseline of nutrients by having your soil tested.

Resolution #2: Plan
Plan the layout of your garden. Avoid planting crops from the same family in the same spot 2 years in a row. Consider the path of the sun, so tall crops don’t shade shorter ones. Space plants a healthy distance apart. If space is an issue, consider square-foot gardening, or find out if community garden space is available.

Resolution #3 Reduce Pest Incidence
There exists multiple ways to reduce your weeds, insects and diseases. Pick one or more of the following and try it. If you like to weed then don’t change this practice but if you hate weeding like me, then try landscape cloth, mulch, newspaper, boxes, or straw. For insect control you might research the various “weeds” or wildflowers that attract beneficial insects that keep the bad guys at bay. For diseases consider varieties that are tolerant to the culprit bacteria, viruses or fungi you had the previous year. Finally, row covers and low and high tunnels are additional tools to think about in the war against pests.

Resolution #4: Compost
Convert your yard clippings, leaves and fruit/vegetable waste into a wonderful soil amendment filled with beneficial microbes for your garden. Compost piles can be as simple as a 4ft by 4ft pile to as fancy as a 3 binned set-up made of pressure treated wood or concrete block. Composters can be built at home or found at your local garden centers.

Resolution #5 Sanitation
Maintain good garden cleanliness. Remove diseased leaves, fruits and vines, keep your tools clean; and of course control your weeds. Consider mulch!
When To Start Garden Plans – Learn About End Of Season Garden Planning
https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/info/end-of-season-garden-planning.htm

The end of the growing season can be both rewarding and sad. All your hard work has resulted in a beautiful garden and maybe vegetables, herbs, and fruits you can enjoy in months to come. End of season garden planning is your next task. Clean the dirt out from under your fingernails and head indoors to dream and plan next year’s garden.

When to Start Garden Plans
Garden planning in winter (or even fall) is the perfect balm for the dreary season. Of course, there is no wrong time to start planning for the coming spring, but don’t leave it too long or you’ll be rushing. This down time is the perfect time to prepare for what comes next. There isn’t much you can do out in the garden, but indoors you can assess, plan, and purchase.

Tips for Planning Next Year’s Garden
Start by assessing the garden that has just gone dormant. Reflect on what you liked about it, what didn’t work, and what you wish you had done differently. Maybe you found a great tomato variety, you want to use again. Perhaps your peonies didn’t like being transplanted and need something to fill in that void. Do some reflecting now so you remember what worked and what didn’t. Then dig in and make those plans.

- **Do some research and get inspired.** This is a great time to dream about what could be. Leaf through seed catalogs and garden magazines to get ideas and find new varieties to try.
- **Make a list.** Now make a master list of plants. Include those that will stay put, like perennials, those you need to remove, and any annuals like vegetables and flowers you want to grow.
- **Make a map.** A visual tool is so helpful. Even if you don’t expect to change much about the layout, map out your garden to look for places that could be improved or spots for new plants.
- **Order seeds.** Make sure you have your seeds ready to go in time to begin starting them ahead of the last frost of spring.
- **Make a planting schedule.** With a list, map, and seeds you’re ready to make a real plan. When will you do what? Considering frost dates and when certain plants should be started, create a schedule to keep your work on track.
- **Buy materials.** Check up on tools, potting soil, seed trays, and make sure you have everything in place when it’s time to start planting.

URLs in this post:
Washington plots war on invasive Japanese beetle
By DON JENKINS Capital Press  Nov 19, 2021

The Washington State Department of Agriculture plans to spread a granular insecticide on about 7,000 properties in Grandview, a Yakima County town, in an effort to kill Japanese beetles.

For the spring campaign, the department intends to use Acelepryn G, a product the Environmental Protection Agency says doesn't endanger people or pets if properly applied.

The department will seek landowner permission, but is ready to invoke its emergency powers if needed, managing entomologist Sven Spichiger said. "Unfortunately, this is one of those deals where if you do 50 properties and one in the middle decides to say 'no,' you may as well not have done the other 50 properties", he said.

Japanese beetles are an invasive pest with a wide appetite that includes some of Central Washington's most-valuable crops, such as grapes, apples and hops. Idaho and Oregon have also battled infestations. For the first time, Washington has an infestation to fight. The state department trapped more than 25,000 beetles, concentrated in Grandview, this year. "This is still a containable event," Spichiger told the state Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Parks Committee at a Nov. 16 workshop.

The department plans to put down and water in Acelepryn to kill grubs before they emerge in the summer to feed on plants. "It is a very short window that we have," Spichiger said. "Because of the life cycle of the pest, we need to start doing this late March, early April."

Trapping restrains the population, but other states have needed chemicals to gain the upper hand, he said. "The surveillance helps a little, but it's not the complete answer."

The Oregon Department of Agriculture applies Acelepryne in its ongoing campaign to eradicate Japanese beetles in the Portland area. The infestation was found in 2016. Idaho also used the chemical against an infestation in Boise discovered in 2012.

Acelepryn's active ingredient is chlorantraniliprole, classified by the EPA as a "reduced risk" pesticide. Other insecticides are available, such as Bacillus thuringiensis galleriae. "We have a few other insecticides we can use," Spichiger said. "The other states that have used them say they are absolutely not as effective, but it is an option we can go to if we absolutely have to."

The state has broad police powers to spray for insects. The agriculture department anticipates a multi-year campaign, featuring chemicals and a quarantine. "We're hoping that people see the inherent danger of allowing a dangerous insect like this from becoming established," Spichiger said.
Soil Health Initiative and WSDA looking for samples, participants


Dani Gelardi  WSDA Soil Health Scientist

Healthy soil is the key to success in farming. With healthy soil, farms are more successful, our environment is cleaner, and Washington can keep growing nutritious food for generations to come. With more than 300 different commodities grown in the state, healthy soil looks different from place to place and from crop to crop.

Background

In the fall of 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded a $500,000 specialty crop block grant to WSDA’s Natural Resources Assessment Section (NRAS) that funded a soil health survey project in partnership with Washington State University (WSU). In spring of 2020 the state Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 6306 that created the Washington Soil Health Initiative (WaSHI), which provided $200,000 of additional funding to NRAS for more soil health research and outreach.

WSDA looking for more soil samples

Researchers have already been collecting soil samples as part of this initiative. But as the program begins to launch, coordinators are looking for Washingtonians who may be interested in contributing soils data to the WaSHI State of the Soils Assessment.

If you’re a grower, an agricultural professional, a graduate student, or a conservation district staff member who wants to soil sample, we want to hear from you.

Beginning in March of 2022, WSDA will pay for a laboratory soil health analysis for eligible projects, in exchange for support in collecting soil samples and grower management surveys. WSDA will also provide training and individualized soil health reports for participating growers.

Soils data will be used to measure soil health across different regions and crops in Washington. This information will help WSDA protect grower livelihoods, environmental sustainability, and food security in Washington.

The deadline to apply to participate is 5 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. For more information or to apply, visit the NRAS Partnerships in Soil Health webpage:

https://agr.wa.gov/departments/land-and-water/natural-resources/soil-health/funding-opportunities
Many dog owners have switched their pets to grain-free, exotic-ingredient, vegetarian, vegan, or home-prepared diets over the past decade. The trend toward these “boutique diets,” however, has coincided with an increase in reports of dogs with dilated cardiomyopathy, the most common cause of heart failure in certain large breed dogs.

**What is dilated cardiomyopathy?** Dilated cardiomyopathy is a disease of the heart muscle that results in weakened contractions and poor pumping ability. As the disease progresses, the heart chambers become enlarged, valves may leak, and signs of congestive heart failure develop. While the disease is not always severe enough to cause symptoms, in other cases it can be life-threatening or even fatal due to an irregular heartbeat and congestive heart failure. Read more about dilated cardiomyopathy. Historically, dilated cardiomyopathy was primarily seen in breeds known to have a genetic predisposition to the disease, but in recent years the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reported an increase in the number of cases in other breeds. In many of the cases, the affected animals were being fed “boutique diets.” The FDA alerted the public to the issue in 2018, and since then the agency and veterinary researchers have been investigating the role of diet in the increased reports.

**What we know.** There has historically been evidence of diet-responsive dilated cardiomyopathy in some breeds (golden retrievers, cocker spaniels, but the incidence in these breeds has appeared to increase when eating grain-free, vegetarian/vegan, or exotic-ingredient foods. In other cases, the breeds of dogs developing dilated cardiomyopathy appear unusual, meaning the dog does not have a breed history of an inherited type of the disease, or the dog may be young. Recent studies have identified differences in blood metabolites of dogs eating some boutique diets compared to standard diets, suggesting that dogs’ bodies may process boutique diets differently. Taurine deficiency may be a factor in some breeds (those listed above), but it is unclear whether it is a cause or merely an association with yet unknown other dietary components. Dogs with dilated cardiomyopathy that have been eating the diets described above may reverse the condition if it is caught early or if they respond favorably to a change in diet.

**What we recommend.** If your dog does not have a medical condition requiring alterations in specific dietary ingredients, we recommend feeding a diet made by a well-established manufacturer that contains standard ingredients and has a record of long-term nutritional research. If your dog has been diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy and is eating a boutique-type diet, we recommend changing the diet and measuring whole blood and plasma taurine levels if the breed is known to be taurine sensitive.

* If taurine levels are low or on the low end of the normal range, dietary supplementation of taurine should be added.
* Follow-up echocardiography should be performed in 3, 6, and 12 months to assess for improvement in heart function after diet change.
* Screening echocardiography for dilated cardiomyopathy should be performed in all dogs of the same household eating the non-standard diet.

If your dog has a medical condition that requires a non-standard diet, we suggest a diet made by a well-established manufacturer that has undergone extensive Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) feeding trials. Your veterinarian can help you choose an appropriate diet for your dog’s medical condition.
Owners of dogs with possible diet-associated dilated cardiomyopathy should save samples (and product labels) of all dietary components they are currently feeding, including the main food, treats, chews, and supplements. With complete diet information in hand, the veterinarian or owner should report the case to the FDA, which can be done either online or by telephone, as this will help the agency identify possible underlying causes as quickly as possible.

WSU veterinary cardiologists Ryan Baumwart, DVM, ACVIM-CA and O. Lynne Nelson, DVM, ACVIM-CA, IM are board-certified in companion animal cardiology.

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care. Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian. Washington State University assumes no liability for injury to you or your pet incurred by following these descriptions or procedures.

WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, 205 Ott Road Pullman, WA 99164-7060

Winter Care for Backyard Chickens
Adapted from Douglas B. Gucker, Illinois Extension

Winter begins challenges to the small flock chicken owner. There are issues that need to be solved: keeping the water from freezing, preventing the birds from getting frostbite, and maintaining egg production.

Winterize the Coop
Chickens need a dry, draft-free, and well-ventilated building to stay healthy and productive. Winterize your coop by:
  - Placing 6-12 inches of dry bedding on the floor
  - Checking for drafts
  - Adding insulation to the roof and walls
  - Making sure windows and doors are tight fitting and secure
  - Making sure you have proper ventilation. A roof vent and a partially open window will do the trick

Water
Chickens need access to water at least every 10 hours, day and night. Prevent water from freezing by installing a heater in the waterer or by using heated a water bowl. When using heaters or heated bowls, make sure the electrical cords and connections are off the floor and not accessible to the chickens. Check daily for water spills and leaks, since these can cause increased moisture in the coop and health issues.

Feed
Your chickens will need more food in the winter to stay warm. Feed a good, balanced diet. You might consider allowing your birds to eat free-choice. Chickens will adjust their eating according to the temperature. Another option to free-choice feeding is to scatter high energy feed like grains or oilseeds in the evening in the coop. This will encourage the birds to be active and forage through the litter for their feed. Also, this foraging activity will help to turn over the litter and keep the birds from pecking each other.

Frostbite. Chickens with large combs or wattles are more susceptible to frostbite. For small flocks, applying petroleum jelly to large wattles and combs will reduce the chance for frostbite. Remove snow from chicken runs or scatter straw to protect their feet.

Light & egg laying
Chickens need 14-16 hours of light to encourage egg-laying. Hanging a 60-watt incandescent light or an 800-lumen equivalent lamp with a downward-facing reflector at seven feet above the floor will provide sufficient light for 200 square feet of coop floor area.
Gallic acid and stretching decrease osteoarthritis markers in cartilage cells

By Sara Zaske, WSU News & Media Relations

PULLMAN, Wash. – A healthy diet and a little exercise appear to be good for arthritis, even on the cellular level.

A team led by Washington State University researchers used gallic acid, an antioxidant found in gallnuts, green tea and other plants, and applied a stretching mechanism to human cartilage cells taken from arthritic knees that mimics the stretching that occurs when walking. The combination not only decreased arthritis inflammation markers in the cells but improved the production of desired proteins normally found in healthy cartilage.

While still at an early stage, the findings suggest a new procedure could be developed to treat cartilage cells extracted from a patient to grow a supply of cells or a tissue to be re-implanted. “We found the combined stretching, which acts like an exercise for the cell itself, with the gallic acid decreased inflammation markers, which means we were able to reverse osteoarthritis,” said Haneen Abusharkh, the study’s lead author and a recent WSU Ph.D. graduate. “It’s basically like having good exercise and a good diet on a micro-scale.”

For the study, published in Experimental Cell Research, the researchers harvested osteoarthritic cartilage cells from donated knees taken out during joint replacement surgery at Pullman Regional Hospital. They cultured the cells in the lab and first tested six antioxidant “nutraceuticals,” or nutritional products, including Vitamin C, Vitamin E and curcumin. Antioxidants can neutralize free radicals, unstable atoms that result from oxidative stress which can damage cells and tissues. The laboratory tests suggested gallic acid as the most effective antioxidant for neutralizing the free radicals in the osteoarthritic cartilage cells. The researchers then applied the gallic acid and added stretching, using a cytostretcher developed by the company Curi Bio Inc. They set stretching to 5%, a level that matches the stretch in human knees when walking.
The combination decreased inflammation markers known as matrix metalloproteinases. It increased the deposition of collagen and glycosaminoglycans, which are compounds that give connective tissue its integrity, tensile strength and resistance to compressive forces from body weight on the joints. The stretching and gallic acid also increased the expression of two other cartilage-specific proteins.

Osteoarthritis, the most common musculoskeletal disorder in the world, destroys cartilage in joints causing pain and limiting movement. As of yet there is no complete cure, and treatments range from prescribing pain killers to replacing the joint surgically with a synthetic one, but even the surgery does not allow the patient to return to a full range of motion.

Another procedure is called autologous chondrocyte implantation, or ACI, which involves removing cartilage cells from the joint, growing them to large numbers and then re-implanting them. Currently, the cells are not treated before re-implantation, the researchers noted, and the lack of treatment results in cells growing a weaker fibrocartilage. They can also remain affected by osteoarthritis, and these procedures do not return full functionality to the joint. This study shows a potential way to develop a similar procedure by first treating the cartilage cells while growing them into a tissue that could then be re-implanted.

“We are advancing techniques to make regenerative cartilage in the laboratory that could potentially be implanted into cartilage lesions, so that joint replacements would decrease in number,” said Bernard Van Wie, WSU professor in the Voiland School of Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering and the study’s principal investigator and corresponding author. “We’re looking to develop a natural cartilage that works properly from the beginning, rather than replacing the joint.”

The study adds evidence that it may be good to eat foods high in antioxidants—and to exercise, although the researchers caution that gallic acid should not be seen as a miracle cure, and any course of action should be taken only in consultation with a person’s doctor.

“This provides some evidence that a good diet and an exercise actually work,” said Abusharkh. “Even for people who have mild osteoarthritis, it’s really good to exercise. It’s very bad for our cartilage tissue to just lay down or sit the whole day; we have to have a little bit of activity.” This study was funded in part by the National Science Foundation and a National Institute of Health Protein Biotechnology Training Program.

Media Contacts
Bernard Van Wie, WSU Voiland School of Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering, 509-335-4103, bvanwie@wsu.edu

Haneen Abusharkh, WSU Voiland School of Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering, haneen.abusharkh@wsu.edu

Sara Zaske, WSU News & Media Relations, 509-335-4846, sara.zaske@wsu.edu
Clutter Making You Crazy? How to Deal With Hoarding
Tips to help you declutter, go minimalist

https://health.clevelandclinic.org/clutter-making-you-crazy-how-to-tell-if-youre-a-hoarder/

Oh, clutter. You make us crazy. You hide our registration renewal notice from the DMV under junk mail. You make it impossible to find a replacement light bulb so we buy another instead. You fill our closets with coats for all seasons (and sizes) and drawers with pencils and tchotchkes galore.

If a problem with clutter seems overwhelming, don’t despair. The good news is that you can actually improve your health by getting rid of clutter — and it’s easier than you think.

Why do we have problems with clutter?
“Clutter and hoarding behavior are very common problems,” says clinical psychologist Scott Bea, PsyD. Part of the problem is cultural: We live in a society that’s driven by consumerism, and many people amass things that they don’t need simply because acquiring stuff is what Americans do, he says. Whether you feel like you must have the latest trends, engage in “retail therapy” to cheer yourself up, or succumb to persuasive advertising, you may end up with a house full of items of questionable use. And because our culture is so focused on acquiring things, many of us have trouble recognizing when we have enough — or too much.

Why is it so hard to let it go?
The word clutter actually comes from the middle English word “clotter.” You might say it can clot the flow of life, stopping you from using what you have, and making it hard to identify what you really need. “Making decisions about ‘What do I do with this item now?’ is sometimes difficult,” Dr. Bea says. “Some people feel extremely stressed by this dilemma.” If you struggle to make decisions about what to do with an object once you’re done with it, you might escape the tense situation by just not deciding. Once you get into a habit of this, things start to pile up, and before you know it, there's a clutter problem.

Dr. Bea identifies a number of thoughts that people often have that can lead to indecision, including:
- Maybe I will need this someday
- This reminds me of a special moment in my life.
- I spent good money on this.
- Maybe I will fit into this outfit again someday.

The more you struggle with these thoughts, the more likely you are to have a clutter problem.
How does clutter take its toll on your health?
Clutter can impact your health in many ways, and some of them might surprise you. Clutter can cause you to be:

- **Chronically distracted.** “Existing in a cluttered environment taxes our brains because the cluttering objects compete for our attention,” Dr. Bea says. As a result, you become chronically distracted and, as Dr. Bea describes it, an “involuntary multi-tasker” — your focus shifts from where you want it to the objects that surround you. This makes it hard to get anything done, whether you’re aiming for productivity or just wanting to relax and enjoy yourself.

- **Overwhelmed.** You may experience heightened anxiety, self-criticism and shame about the state of your house. These feelings can contribute to depression.

- **Stressed out.** Clutter doesn’t just impact your mental health, though. Feeling stressed about clutter can trigger the release of stress hormones such as cortisol, which can make physical health conditions worse.

- **Challenged when you try to clean.** Having too much stuff makes it difficult to dust and vacuum, which can make allergies and asthma worse.

- **At risk if there’s ever a fire.** In severe cases, clutter can create a fire hazard when your stuff blocks exits or there are large numbers of flammable items piled up.

What’s the best way to address clutter?
Here are some ways to cope with clutter and get it out of your life:

- **Enlist some help.** “Getting some outside assistance to help with the decision-making process is one of the most effective ways to overcome the stress associated with clutter,” says Dr. Bea. This might be a family member, friend, or paid decluttering consultant. This is effective because your helper won’t experience the same high levels of tension associated with making tough decisions and discarding items, which can make the process faster and less stressful.

- **Set some rules.** Especially if you’re going it alone, it helps to set some guidelines for yourself, and then stick to them. You may decide, “I need to throw out all magazines dated earlier than 2019” or “If I have not worn it in the last two years, it has to go.”

- **Break it down.** If your clutter problem affects your whole home, it’s unrealistic to expect that you’re going to resolve it in a day or two. Instead, find some way to break the task into smaller parts. You may decide to go room by room, or focus on particular categories — dealing with all clothing in the house, or all the books, for instance.

- **Have a plan.** Many decluttering experts advocate sorting items into three piles: Keep, Donate and Trash. Make sure that at the end of each decluttering session you put away the items you’re keeping and put the stuff you’re throwing out in the trash. If possible, take donations immediately to their destination, or at least schedule a time to do so.

What’s the difference between clutter and hoarding?
It’s a matter of severity. If your clutter is making it difficult for you or others to lead a normal lifestyle, or if it’s creating unhealthy living conditions, you may have a problem with hoarding. “Individuals with hoarding problems rarely seek help on their own,” says Dr. Bea. “It is often a family member concerned or frustrated by the hoarding that compels the person to treatment.”

People with hoarding problems often have strong rationalizations to support their problematic habits. “Folks with clutter are less likely to defend themselves so strongly,” says Dr. Bea. In other words, if you’re able to identify that your clutter is a problem, you’re probably not a hoarder.