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Now Where Are Those Dishes? How to Survive Unpacking

By dan the roommate man

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In a short time, I'll be moving again. The thought of it makes my hair stand on end. Strangely enough, my trepidation doesn't come from the process of packing itself – although it's certainly a pain to wrap all of one's dishes in newspapers and bubble wrap, to lug all of the clothes out of the closet and to make the executive decision whether or not to throw away that salad shooter that I've never used but for which I'll probably devise an ingenious use the moment I pull away from the local Goodwill.

No, instead it's the unpacking that I can't stand. It's the tearing open of boxes, the unloading, the mess all over my home that sits there for days. The frustration of not knowing just where I put my silverware or bath towels. The inevitable damage that always occurs to something ... and Murphy's Law guarantees that "something" will be the last thing you wanted damaged.

Of course, if you're the Martha Stewart of movers, you won't waste a minute letting those boxes sit idle. No, instead, you'll plunge into them, unpacking and arranging. You won't get a moment's rest until every last possession has found a home. Those of us in the real world, however, have to determine what must be unpacked first and what can be unpacked later. We resign ourselves to the fact that our new homes will look like a disaster area for an indefinite period to be determined by our respective energy and sanity levels. After all, when you move into a new residence, you've got a million loose ends to tie up, not the least of which is starting a new job or helping get the kids acclimated to their new neighborhood and school.

So forget about committing yourself to some imaginary timetable. Instead, unpack in stages. But what stage should come first? What are the items you need first?

Let's step back a second. First of all, unpacking will be far easier if you've labeled all of your boxes by their corresponding room, and either you or the movers have placed them in the correct place. You'll score extra efficiency points by listing the contents of each box on the side. If you haven't done either one of these, then you'll be spending quite a bit of time breaking open boxes and dumping out their contents in your pursuit of one specific item ... which, by the way, you won't find until you reach the very bottom of the very last box.

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In which room should you begin your unpacking? It's a tie: your kitchen and your bathrooms are both vitally important and rather pressing in the scheme of everyday life. Even if you don't plan to start cooking immediately upon your arrival (and by the way, you shouldn't – give yourself a break), the kitchen characteristically is a gathering place for families. Tackle this room early, and at least you'll have a spot to eat your take-out Chinese food or microwave popcorn. You don't need to unpack those items you don't use often or don't plan to use in the immediate future – for example, your bread machine, carving knife or spice rack. Just unpack the vital items for now (paper towels, coffee maker, silverware and everyday dishes), and move the other boxes to the corner of the room to clear a pathway.

Your bathrooms don't have to look gorgeous, either. If you're a relatively savvy mover, you've

undoubtedly packed a bag of toiletries you'll immediately need upon your arrival, including soap, toilet paper, tissues, towels, shampoo and personal grooming items. Depending upon the size of your family, you can certainly unpack in one bathroom initially, then hit the others when you find time (or when World War III breaks out among family members).

Now, you've unloaded the basics – the must haves. What comes next? That's really your call. You may want to consider unpacking in the room people see first when they enter your home: your living room. You're probably going to have unannounced guests, and while nobody expects your home to look like a showplace right after the movers pull away, you don't want your guests to walk into a disaster area, either. Again, if you're a veteran mover, you've already considered where your living room furniture should be placed. You've sketched the layout so that you're not straining your back hauling those heavy pieces from wall to wall. Plug in as many lamps as possible to create at least the aura of a home. Cut yourself some slack — the art on the walls and the accessories on the shelves can wait. For the first few days, you're just striving for furniture placement and perhaps even hanging the curtains, if you can remember where you packed them.

Last but not least, the bedrooms. The kids' bedrooms should come first because establishing a sense of comfort is key to helping your children adjust to their new surroundings. Encourage your kids to unpack their own belongings and arrange them in their new rooms as they see fit. This gives them a sense of control over the move. If you find yourself running out of time to set up the bedrooms on your first day in your new house, drag out a few sleeping bags, and gather the family on the living room floor. It's wise to consider before your move whether or not you'll sleep on the floor on your first night. Planning ahead will enable you to pack the family's sleeping bags in a spot where they're accessible. Once you hit the bedrooms, again, arrange your furniture according to pre-drawn sketches.

As the old saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. And neither should your palace. Take your time, save your sanity, and loosen your standards of neatness and punctuality a bit.

Since 1989 Dan the Roommate Man has helped 1000's of people find roommates. Need help? Contact him at 800-487-8050 or www.roommateexpress.com

Priorities: Don't Dry Your Dishes

By David Leonhardt

Do your dishes really need to be dried, or could you just let the water evaporate? If you spend just 5 minutes per meal drying dishes, that equals a quarter of an hour per day, or 91 hours each year.

Imagine spending almost four days in a row standing at the sink drying dishes. No eating. No sleeping. No bathroom breaks. Just drying dishes for four days straight.

Now imagine doing something else with that time. Savoring the fresh air. Going on a camping trip. Playing with your children. Volunteering at the food bank. Upgrading your career skills. You can do a lot in four days.

Or you can dry dishes.

Some chores we have to do (like washing the dishes). But some are optional. You are given a short time to live. How you spend that time is your choice.

This inspiration was first published in A Daily Dose of Happiness: (

), to which one subscriber commented:

"Another thought is, do dishes, laundry, sweeping, dusting, and other chores as a family. The best conversations I ever had with my parents, grandparents, and other family members were when we were doing dishes or laundry, etc. TOGETHER!"

To that, I had to laugh...and respond: "Indeed, folding laundry is what passes for going on a date in our house!"

David Leonhardt is author of *Climb Your Stairway to Heaven: the 9 habits of maximum happiness*:

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