

Move

Settle In With Our 11-Step Game Plan for Unpacking Your Move

By [Holly Amaya](#) | Oct 20, 2017

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Few things are more stressful than packing up the contents of your entire home—except, that is, *unpacking* that intimidating labyrinth of boxes, bags, and bundles once you've landed in your new place.

But with a little organization (and maybe a lot of wine) you can make the experience a lot more efficient and—dare we say—enjoyable. Read on for our expert-approved game plan for unpacking your move. (Hint: It starts before you say *sayonara* to your old house.)

1. Before you ship out, pack a 'Day 1' box

Save yourself the stress of wondering where your footie pajamas, contact solution, and phone chargers might be, and pack a "Day 1" box of essentials that'll get you through your first 24 to 48 hours in your new place.

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"It may take a few days or even weeks at your new home before you get comfortable," explains relocation expert **Bill Mulholland** of ARC Relocation Services. "Pack a bag of essential items for each person in your family so you're not digging through boxes— and include toiletries, medicine, and clothing for the first few days."

Pro tip: Make sure your Day 1 bag holds a few box cutters; you'll need them to make the task of opening dozens of boxes more tolerable.

Professional organizer **Darla DeMorrow** of HeartWork Organizing recommends the following technique: "Cut with an 'H' motion," she says. "Cut one side, then the other side, then the long strip down the middle while you lift it up slightly. Using this technique, you won't accidentally cut into the items inside the box."

2. Prep your new place

Create a clean canvas at your new place, preferably the day before your stuff arrives, DeMorrow recommends. Make sure the floors are spotless, wipe down the cabinets, lay shelf paper (if that's your thing), and be sure you have extra furniture dollies if necessary.

3. Have the movers wait while you take stock

We know you're probably raring to go, but before you dismiss [your moving crew](#), give everything a once-over.

"Don't sign anything from the movers or shipping company until you inspect the packages," says home organization expert **Christina Harmon**.

We know this sounds like a total pain, but it's well worth it. "Once you sign, you're accepting their state of delivery," Harmon points out.

4. Do a load of laundry

As soon as you cross the threshold of your new place, throw your towels and bed linens in the washing machine so they're ready for your inaugural new-house shower and sleep.

5. Set up your bed

It might be tempting to start unpacking in the kitchen or den—after all, those places are where you do the most living. But experts agree it's best to start where you sleep. Set up your bed with fresh linens so you'll have a comfy place to rest after unpacking. If you can't find your bed frame or can't deal with putting it together on Day 1, it's fine to put your mattress on the floor for the time being.

6. Purge

This should be done [before you move](#). But if you didn't [take the time to purge](#) before packing up your old home, start a donation pile now so your junk doesn't find a permanent space in your new home. If you haven't listened to that **Paul Wall** CD in 10 years or worn your high school letterman jacket since the '90s, you probably won't do either now.

7. Create an 'elsewhere bin'

DeMorrow recommends creating an "elsewhere bin" in the room when you unpack.

"You might decide that the candlelighter, which lived in the kitchen in the old house, should really go in the living room in the new house," she says. "Save a few steps and park it in the elsewhere bin until you are ready to head to another room."

Similarly, group unused organizing gadgets together and move them along as you unpack.

8. Unpack the kitchen

Ordering in Chinese and pizza every day gets awfully old awfully fast. "You need to [set up your kitchen](#) so you can *use* it," Harmon says.

Unpack the items you use daily, starting with cutlery; pros recommend stashing your knives, forks, and spoons in the first drawer to the right of your sink or dishwasher. (You might want to reverse that if you're left-handed.)

Store your plates, cups, and glasses at eye level or lower, preferably close to your sink or dishwasher. Stash pots and pans near the stove—don't forget lids—and place heavier items such as cast-iron skillets or small kitchen appliances as close to the floor as you can.

9. Attack the bathroom

In the bathroom, start with your shower curtain, shampoo and conditioner, body wash, and clean towels. You can unpack your other bathroom gear later.

10. Throw perfection out the window

Loosely arrange each room by placing large, already-assembled items where you think they should go, Harmon says. If your artwork and personal photographs are available (read: not packed in boxes), lean them against the wall where you think you might want them and let it simmer a day or two before you start installing.

"I'm not a big fan of being overly meticulous about layout in advance—I think it's overkill and a waste of time," she says. "See if you like how things feel in that room and move on to the next room. You can adjust later."

11. Leave the garage for last

Don't kill yourself trying to unpack your garage and storage spaces overnight. They're typically pass-through portions of the home where you won't spend much time, so you can take your time getting organized. And if you're anything like us, your garage is usually a repository of half-finished projects, bicycles, and kids' toys. You'll be back there soon enough.

Based in San Diego, Holly Amaya is a writer, lawyer, and communications strategist. She writes about real estate, legal, lifestyle, motherhood, and career issues.

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