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Packing probably tops the list of things people dread about moving. Perhaps it's because we find out how much we really have accumulated since the last move.

It would be wonderful if somehow magically all of your belongings were transported through space from Home A and put in place at Home B. Until that time, your two options are hiring someone or packing yourself. If you choose the latter, here are some tips for safeguarding your belongings from the rigors of transit.

Planning

First and foremost, don't wait until the last minute. Moving is stressful enough. Give yourself at least six weeks, which gives you enough time to pack a few boxes each day.

Take inventory of your items to determine how many packing boxes you will need. As a rule of thumb, use small boxes for small, heavy items such as books and canned goods; medium-size for bulkier, not so heavy items like linens and pots; and reserve larger boxes for very bulky lightweight items such as lamp shades.

Obtain boxes from a moving company or collect sturdy boxes from local supermarkets and liquor stores. Also, consider investing in specialty boxes, such as wardrobe and mirror/painting cartons. Wardrobe boxes are specially designed to transport clothing on hangers and mirror/painting cartons adjust to fit large sizes.

Besides boxes, make sure you have marking pens, packing peanuts or bubble wrap, strong 2-inch wide packing tape, and unprinted newspaper. Don't use printed newspaper to wrap individual items because the ink could wear off on them.

Next, have a plan for what you will pack first. Pack items you seldom use and those out of season first. Places like your attic, basement, garage, and closet shelves are a great place to start. Then work your way up to items, like dishes, that you use every day.

Decide what you will need to access as soon as you arrive at your destination. Write "Open First" on these boxes and load them onto the truck last or put them in your car. You also should pack a box with essentials for your first few nights, such as prescription medicine, toiletries, a telephone, clothing, towels, toilet paper, and bed linen.

Pack one room at a time. Clearly mark on each box the contents and the room it will go in at your new residence. Also, for fragile items, clearly mark "fragile" on the box and a directional arrow to indicate the correct upright position.

Techniques

Before packing your computer, back up your data. Use the original boxes and packaging. If you no longer have them, use

a box with shock resistant insulation or create padding at the bottom and all around the sides. If you will be using packing peanuts, wrap the computer in a plastic bag so the peanuts won't get inside and damage the computer. Place the CPU in the center of the box with the motherboard side lying flat on the bottom. Protect the top with more padding. Make sure the computer is a tight-fit in the box. Use this technique for your monitor and printer. Don't forget to remove the print cartridge and paper from the printer. This same procedure can be used with other electronics.



To pack glasses and stemware: Stuff a bit of paper inside a glass, wrap the stem, and then wrap each piece individually. Place glasses face down on a 3- to 4-inch cushion of crumpled newspaper. Top off the box with 2 to 3 inches of crumpled paper.

To pack plates: Create a 3- to 4-inch cushion of crumpled paper in a sturdy box or dish pack. Wrap up to four plates at a time by taking two sheets of newspaper, place a plate slightly off center, fold paper over the plate, then stack a plate on top of the covered plate. Fold paper back over the second plate and repeat this process until four plates are wrapped. Now wrap the bundle and place it on end in the box. Continue to fill the box with bundled plates, and then top it with 2 to 3 inches of crumpled paper.

To pack large furniture pieces: Have large plastic bags or shrink wrap on hand to protect furniture. Use rags, blankets, comforters and towels for padding.

To pack artwork and mirrors: Wrap all pieces individually with bubble wrap or cardboard. For artwork framed behind glass or mirrors, tape an "X" across the mirror to keep pieces in places in case it should break. Place each piece in its own flat, fitted box and fill in any space with crumpled newspaper.

Other Tidbits

- Avoid damage from leakage by packing your liquids (including medicine) in leak proof containers such as zippered plastic bags. Plastic bags also come in handy for small odds and ends.
- Keep box weights to 50 lbs. or less.
- Use masking tape to secure lids to jars and bottles; hold down moveable parts; and affix nuts, bolts, screws or nails to associated items.
- Place a sock filled with coffee grinds or baking soda in your washer, freezer, and refrigerator to prevent odors.

For more pointers on packing, talk with your moving company representative or your real estate professional.

