

Use things wisely

As the Chinese New Year spring cleaning season is upon us, it's worth looking at how we consume – and throw away – things.

By WONG EE LYNN

VOLUNTEERS and staff who collect reusable items for charity often complain that people tend to donate old, stained and ruined items in very poor condition.

Not only is this habit inconsiderate and insensitive, it is also wasteful. Many people mistakenly believe that they are “doing a

good deed” by “donating” unwanted items to “charity”.

In reality, however, volunteers and staff waste many hours sifting through items that will most likely end up in landfills. Most of the time, only 5-10% of items are fit to be redirected to welfare homes and homeless individuals. Another 10-20% could be recovered for recycling while



Many charity donation bins have become rubbish dumping grounds. How can we use and consume things more wisely? — AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

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the bulk end up being thrown out as rubbish.

What then, most people ask, can they do with “all that stuff” that they can’t use or do not want anymore?

How about reducing the amount of consumer goods you get and throw away in the first place? Say no to unnecessary purchases. Simplify your life by not accumulating clutter in your home.

Another option is to make what you have last longer. Then you spend less money on replacements, and lower your impact on the environment.

Here are some tips on stretching the life span of your things.

1. Clothes

- Wash dark and light-coloured items separately to prevent staining, fading and colour runs. Turn clothes inside out prior to washing to protect the outer surfaces.
- Pull zippers up fully to prevent the rough edges of open zippers from damaging clothes in the washing machine.
- Put delicate clothes in mesh laundry bags to prevent stretching and damage. Wash in cold water whenever possible (rub soap or detergent on stains first), as clothes last longer when subjected to less heat. This will save energy, too!
- Don't hang up clothes that can stretch out of shape, such as sweaters. Fold them instead.
- Avoid soaking clothes for more than a few minutes, or using bleach, as both can break down fibres in clothing.

2. Mobile phones and gadgets

- Switch off the battery charger once your phone, tablet, MP3 player or other device is fully charged. Never charge your device for more than 12 hours.
- Conversely, you should not let your battery get fully drained before you recharge it. Always use the correct charger for your device.
- Cheap knock-off battery chargers can damage batteries and devices.



Pull zippers up fully to prevent the rough edges of open zippers from damaging clothes in the washing machine. — Filepic

- Don't expose your phone or other device to extreme heat or moisture. Don't leave it on your vehicle dashboard or near the refrigerator or stove. And don't bring your devices into the shower or swimming pool with you.

3. Shoes

- Clean and polish work/leather shoes frequently to prevent dirt from entering into the cracks and making the cracks permanent. Polishing also prevents leather from becoming dry and cracked.
- Don't wear dress/office shoes for driving. The back heel of shoes can become damaged and discoloured from rubbing against the car floor mats. Have a pair of spare shoes in the car for driving instead.
- Washing sneakers/trainers will make them look newer, and prevent dried-up dirt from wearing down the soles.
- Rotate (use of) your shoes to give the insides time to air out. Stuff rolled up newspaper into damp shoes to help them dry out faster.

Wong Ee Lynn coordinates the Green Living Special Interest Group as a volunteer of the Malaysian Nature Society. More tips will be published in the coming weeks.