# Overcome spring project overwhelm in 3 simple steps

Now that the weather has caught up with the Groundhog's predication, you can finally dig into the spring projects you've been fantasizing about.

Are you wondering how you'll squeeze in a top-to-bottom house cleanse or a garage sale purge?  Or…any extra project for that matter?

My sister can help.

**DIY of the epic kind.**

In 2010, my sister, Laurel, and her husband committed to restoring the 1890 farmhouse they just bought.



As they stood in the 1970's styled dining room – think faux wood panel with clashing carpet -- they dreamed of stocking feet sliding across wood floors and a fire crackling in an iron stove.

Soon this fantasy morphed into overwhelm as they realized the scope of this project.

**Before restoration**

That is until Laurel tapped into the to-do system she used while working as a pastry chef for a 5-star hotel.

And she's given me permission to pass it along to you.

**Step 1:  Create a "to-doable" list.**

Since overwhelm tends to set in when you look at projects as a whole, break it down into small pieces.

For example, subdivide the top-to-bottom spring cleanse by floor.  Then break that down by room.

Make separate task lists for each mini-project and note how long you think each task will take.

**Hint**:  Writing down time estimates is the key to making this work.

**Step 2:  Complete tasks without wasting precious time.**

If you've ever avoided a project because you can't think of where to start, or what to do in a short amount of time, your list just solved this.

Got twenty minutes and the project's weighing on your mind?  Pick a quick task from the list and do it.



Want the satisfaction of completing a large chunk but don't want to sacrifice an entire weekend?  Match tasks to a specific block of time. Then treat it like an appointment and show up.

See how this works?

Laurel used her list to complete much of the farmhouse restoration on weekdays, after work.

**After restoration**

**Step 3:  Convert to-do into to-done.**

Mark the completed task.  And note the actual time it took.

Laurel used a highlighter.  She found nothing more satisfying than washing her drab list in bright blue.  Plus this motivated her to keep going.

The key is to track your progress.  Use highlighter, crayons, the classic ink-pen cross-out, gold stars.  Whatever satisfies and inspires you to move forward.

That's it.  Follow these steps and you can finish your spring projects in half the time.

How about some tips to make them even more doable?

**4 tips to go from to-do to to-done faster:**

**1.  Keep the list simple.**  It's a reference not a high school final.  So no need to over think this.

If you find yourself staring at blank page, set a timer for 5 minutes and write down every task that comes to mind, no second-guessing. Then add time estimates. You can adjust the list as you go.

A walk through the project location can help too.

**2.  Use the tools you have on hand.**  Is your heart set on using the neon-pink highlighter you don't have?  A red notebook?

These become perfect excuses to procrastinate or bail.

A pen, crayon or pencil works fine.  So does printer paper or construction paper.

As you use this system, you're preferred tools may change anyway.

3.  **Choose "paper" that fits your style.**  Laurel switched from a legal pad to a composition book.  She found more than 24 lines of to-do items per page overwhelming.

Lists give me a rash. But this process works. So I use mindmaps.

Construction paper?  Cocktail napkin?  An iPhone app? What resonates with you?  Use that.

Not sure?  Try on different options to see what fits.

**4. Make this a game.**  Nothing motivates more than friendly competition.  For example, involve the whole family.  Assign points to the tasks.  And whoever accrues the most points wins a prize.

Is your neighbor taking on a similar project?  Challenge her to a friendly competition with a reward.  Free dinner?  The loser cleans the winner's fridge?

**Bonus Tip:**  Apply this to other areas of your life.  Laurel borrowed this system from her pastry job.  I use it to plan colossal writing projects.

Why not apply this to a major work project, a health and fitness program or a major life transition?

The key is to start.  Grab a piece of paper and go.

Sound doable?  Let's get to it.