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*ideas*



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for 31 days

At last, a to-do list you have *time* to complete. Get organized—and have some fun—with this crib sheet of easy tasks that take just 15 minutes...and one glorious second to cross off your list.

LET'S CALL IT JANUARY'S LAW: The more daunting your list of resolutions, the less likely you are to accomplish any of them. And yet, is there anything more truly gratifying than checking off completed tasks? Whether it's something mundane, like balancing your checkbook, or stimulating, like finishing that crossword you've been working on all week, wrapping it up and moving on is like kicking off a pair of high heels after a long day. So instead of amassing another year's worth of guilt for avoiding life-altering actions, try these 31 smaller, but no less satisfying, tasks—one for each day of the month—that can be accomplished in just 15 minutes. If you can't get it all done in January, well, there are 11 other months in the year. So check off the list at your own pace. The reward? Satisfaction, guaranteed.

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Resolutions, begone! An alternative things-to-do-in-15-minutes list for a truly happy New Year.

**1** Write a bona fide letter to someone who won't expect it. Think of a person who really matters to you and recount one of your most hilarious moments together, thank her for guiding you through a difficult time, or just tell her that you want to get together more often.

**2** Enlist everyone in the house, including the kids, to speed-clean one drawer. Set up a box for donations and another for trash. (Just be sure to survey your children's pulled items, in case those pricey ballet slippers made their way into the Salvation Army bin.)

**3** Empty your e-mail in-box. Delete and file. If your entire in-box is too overwhelming to tackle, focus on one day or one week of e-mails first.

**4** Take digital photos of all the valuables in one room for insurance purposes. Keep the photos in a folder with original receipts or estimated values and serial numbers or warranties.

**5** Toss all the liquor bottles in your bar that are less than one-eighth full (like that 1989 crème de menthe). If there's more than a cocktail's worth, try out a new drink, such as a stinger or an Amaretto sour. (For recipes, go to [www.realsimple.com/cocktailrecipes](http://www.realsimple.com/cocktailrecipes).) But remember: "Some low-proof liqueurs can spoil," says Dale DeGross, author of *The Craft of the Cocktail* (Clarkson Potter, \$35). "Spirits of 80 proof will last for years in most cases, but liqueurs should be tasted if they have been stored for that long."

**6** Try one new food.

**7** Donate to your favorite charity. Visit [www.justgive.org](http://www.justgive.org) and browse the nonprofit's 19 different categories (such as "disaster relief" and "environment"), research a charity's financials, decide where to give, and make a donation.

**8** Send a year's worth of blooms to yourself (or a loved one) through a floral site like [www.calyxandcorolla.com](http://www.calyxandcorolla.com), where you can order cut flowers or plants delivered monthly (cost: about \$30 to \$50 a month).

**9** Buy a few lint rollers and hang one near every entrance to the house. No more frantic searching for the defuzzer at the last minute or getting caught in a meeting with Rover's yellow hair all over your black dress.

**10** Schedule a day off from work.

**11** Program five essential numbers into your cell phone, like your doctor and your favorite take-out place, to avoid searching in address books and phone books for the same numbers again and again.

**12** Swap music. Switch MP3 players with your spouse, child, or friend and listen to his or her favorite playlist. You'll discover new artists, and you just might learn something about the person you swapped with. (Your macho husband likes 'N Sync?)

**13** Clean your sink. Really clean it. First rinse it with very hot water. Then use a nonabrasive all-purpose cleanser (such as Bon Ami) to avoid scratching. "Gently and briskly rub with a damp sponge or cloth," says Brian Sansoni, vice president of communication for the Soap and Detergent Association. Rinse and dry with a clean towel, then pour baking soda down the drain to reduce odors.







New Year's (Fun) Resolutions

1. Splurge on lamp for bedroom.
2. Make homemade ice cream.
3. Visit a contemporary-art museum.

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**14** Make your own trail mix by combining the last bits of cereal, raisins, and nuts stashed in the rear of the cupboard. Try leftover Cheerios, pretzel pieces (including the salt at the bottom of the bag), almonds, and chocolate chips.

**15** Create your own “Best of 2006” tally. With all those must-see, -read, and -hear lists popping up at the end of the year, it can be hard to keep track of what you wanted to check out. Visit [www.realsimple.com/bestof2006](http://www.realsimple.com/bestof2006) for lists of the top-10 movies, books, and songs of 2006, according to the editors of *Real Simple*’s sister publication *People*. Note the items that caught your eye over the past year.

**16** Clear all expired food from the refrigerator. For specific guidelines about when to throw out everything from cherries to ketchup, go to [www.realsimple.com/expirationdates](http://www.realsimple.com/expirationdates).

**17** Create a list of parties you think would be fun to throw this year. Then later you can pick one and make it happen. Come up with a fun theme, such as winter carnival, where couples or kids compete for the best snowman and play tug-of-war and snow soccer.

**18** Restack nesting bowls and Tupperware. Match lids with bottoms and toss oddball items.

**19** Make a short wish list of satisfying—and easily doable—“fun” resolutions for the coming year. Include things like visiting a museum you keep meaning to get to, saving for an overseas vacation, or making that Hot Chocolate Cake you saw in *Real Simple*. (For the recipe, go to [www.realsimple.com/hotchocolatecake](http://www.realsimple.com/hotchocolatecake).)

**20** Pare down cooking utensils and gadgets. Remove everything you don’t use regularly (the potato masher) so you don’t waste time hunting for the things that you do use every day (measuring spoons). Put the extra items in a different drawer, or in a clear bin in the pantry or under the sink.

**21** Replace years-old pictures in frames (so long, bad highlights) with new ones (hello, fabulous bob).

**22** Memorize a short poem. A good place to start? The Academy of American Poets audio page, at [www.poets.org/booth/booth.cfm](http://www.poets.org/booth/booth.cfm). Hear poets, including Gwendolyn Brooks, Louise Glück, and Robert Frost, read their own work.

**23** Put all your spare buttons in one box. Take them out of the countless packets you’ve accumulated and put them in a single container.

**24** Flip through the holiday cards you received. You were harried enough just opening the mail through the season. Take 15 minutes to reread Uncle Dan’s family letter and marvel (again) at how much little Will has grown in just one year.

**25** Put a few sturdy glasses in the freezer and store them there. Frosty mugs make iced tea, root beer, lager—even water with lemon—taste better.

**26** Check the oil in your car.

**27** Tighten those loose screws. Take your 15 minutes and walk through the house with a screwdriver. Tighten cabinets, door pulls—anything that has a screw loose. (No, not your husband.)

**28** Cut up fruit and freeze it for smoothies. It’s the perfect use for produce that is almost past its prime.

**29** Remove the wax from your candle holders and change the candles.

**30** Jot down 15 places you’d like to visit in the next 15 years. Whether it’s the Swiss Alps or the Southwest’s Monument Valley, when you’re planning your next vacation, you can pull out your list and get re-inspired.

# 31 ideas for 31 days

Use this worksheet to help you complete all 31 tasks: Check off the “done it” list to record your progress, and jot down goals and ideas for the coming year in the spaces that follow.

## the “done it” list

- I've written a letter to .....
- I've cleaned out the drawers in the:
  - Kitchen       Living room
  - Bathrooms     Office
  - Bedrooms
- My e-mail in-box is empty.
- I have photos of all my valuables.
- I've tossed the liquor bottles.
- I've ordered my flowers.
- I've bought lint rollers...
- ...and hung them near the doors.
- Five essential numbers are in my cell.
- My sink is well cleaned.
- I have fresh trail mix and less clutter.
- I've cleared out the refrigerator.
- My nesting bowls and Tupperware are in order.
- I've pared down my cooking utensils.
- My old frames contain new pictures.
- All my extra buttons are in one box.
- I've reread my holiday cards.
- Glasses are chilling in the freezer.
- I've checked the oil in my car.
- The screws have all been tightened.
- Ripe fruit is frozen, ready for smoothies.
- My candleholders are wax-free.

## the goals and ideas list

New food I'd like to try:

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Charities I'd like to donate to:

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My day off from work is:

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Songs to add to my iPod playlist:

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Best-of-2006 books to read:

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Best-of-2006 movies to see:

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Best-of-2006 music to download:

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Parties I'd like to throw this year:

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My fun goals for the coming year:

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A poem to memorize:

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Fifteen places I'd like to visit in the next 15 years:

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Now, about that nap...



**Keep up the good work** Get new ideas

for organizing everything—from shoes to bills to countertops—sent to your e-mail in-box every week, all year round, with *Real Simple's Weekly Tips* newsletter. Sign up at [www.realsimple.com/tips](http://www.realsimple.com/tips).



**31** Grab a power nap. “Even 5 or 10 minutes can make a difference,” says Chris Drake, a senior scientist at the Henry Ford Hospital Sleep Disorders and Research Center, in Detroit.