What is Swedish death cleaning, and how do you actually do it?

Key facts

- Döstädning joins the Swedish words for "death" and "cleaning." Artist Margareta Magnusson introduced the term to English-language readers in her book (Simon & Schuster, checked 2026-09-18).
- "The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning" was published in the United States on January 2, 2018 by Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster (Simon & Schuster, checked 2026-09-18).
- Peacock turned the book into an unscripted series of the same name. All eight episodes, narrated by Amy Poehler, became available on April 27, 2023 (Peacock, checked 2026-09-18).
- If you donate what you clear out and your total noncash deductions for the year top $500, the IRS requires Form 8283; donations over $5,000 for one item or a group of similar items need a qualified written appraisal (IRS, Instructions for Form 8283, checked 2026-09-24).
- Hiring a professional organizer to help typically runs $50 to $150 an hour, with a full home project averaging about $533, per 2026 industry pricing data (Angi, checked 2026-09-24).
- Old paint, batteries, chemicals and similar household hazardous waste cannot simply go in the trash in most places; collection rules are set by state and local programs, not by one federal standard (EPA, Household Hazardous Waste, checked 2026-09-18).
- Whether you can hand a family member a firearm without a background check depends on the state. Nineteen states plus the District of Columbia require background checks for most private transfers, with several carving out exceptions for certain family transfers (Giffords Law Center, checked 2026-09-24).

Step-by-step checklist to get started

- [ ] Pick one category to start with: storage spaces, not sentimental items
- [ ] Set a realistic pace, weeks or months, not a single weekend
- [ ] Sort into keep, donate, gift to a specific person, and discard
- [ ] For anything you plan to gift, tell that person now, or write it down
- [ ] Photograph sentimental items you are letting go of, if that helps
- [ ] Check state or county rules before disposing of chemicals, paint or batteries
- [ ] Check your state's rule before handing down a firearm
- [ ] Keep receipts and, for larger donations, get an itemized receipt from the charity
- [ ] File Form 8283 if your total noncash donations for the year pass $500
- [ ] Get a written appraisal if a single donated item or group is worth more than $5,000
- [ ] Shred financial and medical documents you no longer need
- [ ] Set up a Legacy Contact or Inactive Account Manager on your phone and email accounts
- [ ] Record what you kept, gave away and where things ended up