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BOOKS

Decluttering? 10 Great Ways to Get Rid of Unwanted Books

Give your used books new life by donating, swapping or selling them. Here's how

By Maria Speidel, AARP

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AARP (SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES (3))

There are countless used books gathering dust on shelves and nightstands or moldering in attics and basements across the country. You probably have your own stacks of long-ignored books — from novels you're not likely to read again to gifted books you know you'll never open.

Why not do a little [decluttering](#), while getting those books into the hands of someone who'd enjoy them? There are many places to donate or sell used books; which ones you choose will depend on how much effort you want to put into the task. Options, described below, range from slipping your last-read novel into your neighbor's Little Free Library to starting a (probably not super-lucrative) bookselling side hustle.



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A few things to consider: First, recycle, rather than donate, damaged books. Second, always check donation guidelines. Some places take everything, while others may eschew certain categories, such as textbooks, yearbooks, dictionaries and encyclopedias.



GETTY IMAGES

1. Little Free Libraries

In all 50 states, volunteers have erected thousands of these house-shaped, front-yard kiosks (here's a [locator](#)) which operate on a “[take a book, share a book](#)” principle. Likewise, keep your eyes peeled for tables and shelves at coffee shops, bars, gyms and community centers that serve the same purpose. These are great places to offload a few books at a time — and maybe find a new one.

2. Giveaway websites

Sign up online for a local [Freecycle](#) or [Buy Nothing](#) group (online or through an app); list your books, and your neighbors may come take them away. I've given away a barely used SAT prep book and picked up some fabulous cookbooks using Buy Nothing, which is active on Facebook. Pro tip: On Buy Nothing, givers can request that receivers “take everything” and regift as they see fit.



3. Hospitals, schools and other receptive institutions

Reach out to children's hospitals, schools, theaters (old hardbacks make great props!) and assisted living facilities to see if your stash fits their needs. Donating locally funnels your used book's value directly into your community and maintains a low carbon footprint, says Tom Matthews, a Cleveland marketing executive who created the website [localbookdonations.com](#) to help folks all over the country find donation sites in their area.

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4. Book donation drop boxes

Better World Books maintains big metal [Green Book Donation boxes](#) in parking lots in more than a dozen states. It resells the donations online and vows to donate one book to a nonprofit for every book sold. The company recycles remainders. Individual libraries and other organizations also run collection boxes.

5. Book swaps

Gather friends or neighbors and ask everyone to bring a book, or books, and trade. Make your own rules — or try the Yankee Swap method where participants draw numbers to determine picking order. In January, the Boston Public Library had a two-hour swap. Patrons came and went, dropping off books that may have been unwanted holiday gifts and taking something more their speed. For this type of large-scale event, Veronica Koven-Matasy, a reader services supervisor at

the library, recommends “salting” the donation pile with desirable volumes and designating a charity for remainders.



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6. Libraries

Many public libraries accept donations and provide a receipt for tax write-offs. The books might go into the collection or be sold by a Friends of the Library group. The Friends of the Studio City Library runs a popular monthly sale at that busy branch of the Los Angeles Public Library, for example, with books priced to move at around 50 cents for paperbacks and up to \$4 for deluxe coffee table books. “All our proceeds go back to the library to fund their programs or to buy extra books,” said Friends Treasurer Albert Ang, a financial consultant. The leftovers are passed on to other charities.

7. Other nonprofits/charities

Nonprofits, from the tiniest church-run shop to major players like the Salvation Army, Goodwill and Vietnam Vets, want your books. In certain areas they may even send a truck to your house and cart them away, ideal for major clear-outs. The hauling service Pick Up Please, which coordinates with nonprofits, is a popular vehicle for this. Check with your favorite charity or pickupplease.org to see if your area is served. (Remember to get a receipt for taxes.)

Donated books, and other media like CDs, are the stars at stand-alone Goodwill bookstores. “We try to give every book a chance,” says Christian Reese, the manager at the Goodwill Bookstore in Tupelo, Mississippi, where most books sell for \$4 and under, and the drive-through drop-off center is not picky. Reese says she would rather sort through a huge bag of donations than lose out on a treasure. (Goodwill donations are sold online, too, at GoodwillBooks.com.)

The Savers thrift store chain also takes books, and a portion of the proceeds go to designated nonprofits.

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8. Donations by mail

You can mail books to nonprofits that collect them for those who cannot easily access books. OperationPaperback.org sends books to troops abroad, including kids’ books for deployed

parents to read remotely to their children. There are also [Prisonbookprogram.org](https://www.prisonbookprogram.org), which serves the incarcerated nationwide, and [Books for Africa](https://www.booksforafrica.org).

9. Secondhand bookstores

Find out if a nearby used [bookstore](#) is accepting donations or buying books. Some will pay cash or give store credit, but they're likely to pay only a small percentage of the prices listed on Amazon and eBay. Since the great COVID clean-out, when everyone was at home and decluttering, many have a backlog. "We were bombarded," says bookseller Lisa Morton of The Iliad in North Hollywood, California, which still takes loads of donations — 20 to 30 boxes a day. What doesn't get sold is put outside for pickers.

Los Angeles' The Last Bookstore, Instagram famous for its oft-photographed book arch, is among the stores that will send a truck for donated books through Re-Bookit! The books are sold at its store or given to libraries and schools.

10. Book-sale apps and websites

Online book resale sites have mushroomed — there are so many that at least one website, [Bookscouter.com](https://www.bookscouter.com), is devoted to assisting sellers by ranking what online buyers will pay for a used book on different sites. (Spoiler: It's typically pennies on the dollar.) Players include [Powell's Books](https://www.powellsbooks.com), the venerable Portland, Oregon, bookseller, and [Thriftbooks.com](https://www.thriftbooks.com). You scan or enter a book's ISBN barcode with your phone or computer, then follow the highest bidder's mailing directions. Obviously, these systems work best for books published after the early 1970s, when books started having International Standard Book Numbers, ISBNs. (The number is on a barcode on the back of the book or on the copyright page.)

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