

Spring is here



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Six easy cleaning projects to do around the house

Warmer days are here and what better way to spend them than ... cleaning? Although enjoying the great outdoors is probably high on many a to-do list come spring, by the end of winter, homes can probably do with a much-needed overhaul. Owners and renters can rely on temperate days to throw open the windows and engage in some easy spring-cleaning projects. The earlier one begins spring cleaning, the more quickly he or she will be able to head outside and bask in the warm spring sun. Spring cleaning tasks can be stretched out across several days to make the jobs more manageable. While certain spring cleaning tasks can be time-consuming, many projects can be started and completed in 30 minutes or less.

1. Look up
Start by looking up at ceilings, molding and ceiling fans. Chances are strong that some cobwebs and dust have formed in these areas. Always begin cleaning by working from the top downward so you don't have to clean any tables counter-tops or floors twice. Static-charged dusting cloths work well to catch and contain dust. Use a pillowcase on ceiling fan blades to clear the dust and keep it from cascading to the floor.

2. Blinds and curtains
Heavy window treatments can be removed and replaced with more gauzy fabrics. This lets in more light and warmth from the sun. Many curtains can be refreshed up right in the laundry, but blinds may require a bit more effort. If the blinds can be snapped out of the brackets, place them in a tub full of vinegar, dish soap and water. Allow them to soak and then rinse with the shower nozzle. Stationary blinds can be cleaned with using an old sock over your hand dipped in a vine-

gar-and-water solution.

3. Change linens
Remove and launder bed linens. While the linens are in the wash, thoroughly dust all furniture and vacuum the carpets. Move furniture so you can reach areas where dust gathers, such as under the bed or dresser.

4. Grout cleaner
Grade school science lessons can be put to use as you look to remove stubborn dirt. Combining baking soda and vinegar produces a reaction that causes the formation of gassy bubbles. These bubbles can help to break up dirt that clings to crevices, such as grout between tiles. Some light scrubbing and then subsequent rinsing can rid surfaces of hard-to-remove dirt.

5. Vacuum vent intakes
Many houses are heated by forced-air systems. The air intake vents can become clogged with dust and other debris. Vacuum these vents so that air flow is not impeded. Let the heat run for a few minutes to catch any small particles that become dislodged, and then change the furnace filter.

6. Clean out the refrigerator

Addressing ant problems

The return of warm weather in the spring often marks the return of animals and insects as well. The spring season is a popular time for insects to mate and build nests. This also may be a time when homeowners see ant "swarms" in or around their homes.

Ants and termites are social creatures, and when their colonies become too large, flying ants will spread out in search of new territories and to establish new queens. This mobility may also be coupled with an increasing number of ants marching on the ground and scaling walls.

Although many species of ants are harmless, homeowners do not want to see ants inside their homes — especially in large numbers. The following strategies can help homeowners address ant infestations this spring.

• **Identify the type of ant around your property.** Consult with online guides or books to

identify the species of ant on your property. Knowing which species of ant is in or around your home can help you address the problem more effectively.

• **Create a food trap.** Ants are attracted to various food sources, such as fats, sweets and proteins. Mixing a very small amount of a food with boric acid can help control ant populations. Ants will bring tainted food back to their colonies and perish.

• **Keep a clean house.** Use vinegar, soap and water to clean areas where ants are seen. Many leave a scent trail of pheromones to tell others where to go for a food source.

• **Treat carpenter ants at the source.** Carpenter ants will not bring back food to the nest. Instead, sprinkle diatomaceous earth, or DE, around outdoor nests to eradicate colonies.

• **Work with an exterminator.** If home remedies do not work, consult with a trained exterminator.

Now is a great time to remove any of those mystery containers growing fuzzy experiments in the back of the refrigerator. Take the food out of the refrigerator and use a food-safe cleaner to scour the shelves

and inside of crisper drawers.

Spring cleaning is a necessary task, but it doesn't have to be a headache. Break up the work into manageable chunks of time, and projects won't feel like such a hassle.

Post-winter garden prep for the warmer months ahead

Lawns and gardens can bear the brunt of winter weather and are often in need of tender loving care by the time spring arrives.

Preparing a garden for spring and summer involves assessing any damage that harsh weather might have caused. As temperatures climb, gardeners can heed the following post-winter garden preparation tips in an effort to ensure some successful gardening in the months ahead.

• **Assess the damage.** Even if winter was mild, gardens might still have suffered some damage. Inspect garden beds and any fencing or barriers designed to keep wildlife from getting into the garden. Before planting anew, fix any damage that Mother Nature or local wildlife might have caused over the past several months.

• **Clear debris.** Garden beds and surrounding landscapes that survived winter without being damaged might still be littered with debris. Remove fallen leaves, branches and even litter that blew about on windy winter days before planting season. Make sure to discard any debris effectively so it does not find its way back into the garden.

• **Turn the greenhouse into a clean house.** Spring cleaning is not just for the interior of a home. Cleaning a greenhouse in advance of spring can help gardeners evict

any overwintering pests that can threaten plant life once spring gardening season arrives. A thorough cleaning, which should include cleaning the inside of greenhouse glass and washing flower pots and plant trays, also can prevent plant diseases from surviving into spring.

• **Check for pests.** Speak with a local gardening professional to determine if there are any local pests to look out for and how to recognize and remove these pests from gardens. Pests may hibernate in the soil over the winter, and such unwelcome visitors can make it difficult for gardens to thrive come spring and summer.

• **Assess plant location.** If plants, flowers or gardens have struggled in recent years or never grew especially vibrant, then gardeners may want to assess the location of their plant life before spring gardening season begins. Some plants may not be getting enough sunlight in certain locations on a property, while others might be overexposed to the sun during spring and summer. Moving plants that are not thriving prior to the start of spring gardening season may be just what gardens need to flourish in the coming weeks.

Spring gardening season is right around the corner, so now is an ideal time to prepare gardens for the warmer seasons ahead.

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