

Spring/Summer

Home & GARDEN





Here's how to clean those hard-to-reach places

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Cleaning your house out after being cooped up indoors for the winter can feel fantastic. Some hard-to-reach spots, however, like to hold onto dirt.

Here are some creative ideas to tackle stubborn cleaning jobs. Some require a small investment of a specialized tool, while others simply require repurposing common household items.

Cleaning small spaces

Dust, crumbs and hair can be nearly impossible to remove from between keyboard keys and in the fine lines and awkward spaces inside your car's interior, such as air conditioning vents. Just be careful not to get it in carpets or any other fabrics. Alternatively, use a small foam paintbrush with a triangular shaped edge, along with some warm soapy water, to clean air vents. (This works great in your car.)

OneGoodThing.com recommends forming an empty toilet paper or paper towel roll into a window track cleaning tool. Attach one end to the vacuum hose (secure with tape) and press the sides of the other end together to fit into the track. You could even

use this trick on sliding door and shower door tracks.

Another great hack from this site is to use regular kitchen tongs to clean blinds. Attach a microfiber cleaning cloth loosely over the ends of the tongs, secure with a rubber band and use it to clean both sides of blind slats at once.

Similarly, wrap the end of a butter knife with a microfiber cloth, secure with a rubber band, and use it to clean the openings of HVAC registers (don't forget air intakes).

Cleaning awkward spaces

A garbage disposal is incredibly useful but notoriously difficult to clean. It's oddly shaped and inaccessible. You might know you can toss in some citrus peels or ice cubes to freshen up the disposal quickly from time to time, but to deep clean this awkward space, try this process.

- Turn off the electrical breaker.

- Spray a foaming cleaner such as Scrubbing Bubbles into the disposal, being careful to lift the rubber flaps (wear rubber gloves).

- Let it sit for 5 minutes.

- Then use a bottle brush to scrub the bottom surface as well as the underside of the rubber flaps.

- Rinse and run the disposal with cold water.

Repurpose old toothbrushes for cleaning oddly shaped or tight spots between faucet levers, hair dryer vents or the dishwasher filter, or even detail your cheese grater, waffle iron or toaster.

The floor behind the toilet is always a tricky spot to access. ThisOldHouse.com recommends using a separate toilet scrubbing brush (not the one you use to clean inside) to scrub this area. Even better, steam the area with a steam cleaner first to loosen grime.



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Get the most out of your WATER HEATER

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

A traditional tank water heater will last about 8 to 12 years. Understanding how a hot water heater works and performing regular maintenance can maximize its life span.

Here are some tips to keep get the most out of your water heater.

How it works

Hot water tanks have an anode rod, usually made from magnesium, aluminum, or an aluminum/zinc alloy. Through electrolysis, the rod attracts corrosive particles in the water to itself, which corrodes the rod.

Eventually the rod is no longer effective and corrosive particles destroy the lining of the tank, which causes it to need replacement. Replacing the rod before it fails — usually in about five years — can double the life of your water heater, according to FamilyHandyman.com. To find out the condition of your anode rod and decide if it needs to be replaced, check the rod every one to two years.

When buying a new anode rod, keep the following tips from FamilyHandyman.com in mind:

- A magnesium rod protects your tank better but doesn't last as long as an aluminum/zinc rod.

- Aluminum/zinc rods are cheaper and are recommended if your water has an odor, but you should consult a water treatment spe-

cialist before switching to an aluminum rod.

Routine maintenance

The following routine maintenance tasks will help keep your water heater in working order. Check your heater's user manual for the steps to perform these maintenance tasks and how often they should be done:

- Check the pressure valve to be sure it's still functional.

- Flush the water tank to get rid of sediment buildup. (A water heater's warranty usually requires that you do this annually to maintain coverage.)

When to replace

BobVila.com offers the following list of ways to know when your water heater needs to be replaced:

- A banging or rumbling noise, which can be caused by hardened calcium buildup from hard water.

- An odd smell in hot water. This could be caused by bacteria or metal contaminating the water.

- A red or yellow tint to hot water, which can signal rust.

- A drop in water temperature or heating capacity can be caused by sediment buildup, which can require replacement if it goes unchecked for too long.

- Water pooling around the base of a water heater tank. If it's not a simple fitting or valve problem, the inside of the tank could be cracked or corroded.

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Inspect your home's exterior after winter

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

After enduring the extreme conditions of winter, your home's exterior could be battered and bruised. Spring is the time to look for signs of damage and make repairs.

Some repairs you can make yourself, while others could require professional services.

Start by getting outside and walking around your house to perform a visual inspection.

Roof

With a pair of binoculars or a camera with a telephoto lens, check for missing shingles, damaged or missing metal pieces or excessive wear. Consult a roofer

for any needed repairs.

Masonry and foundation

Check the foundation and masonry for deterioration, cracking and leaks, recommends E&E General Contracting. Check chimney masonry for signs of vegetation growth, water infiltration, cracked or missing bricks or stones, and have a mason make any needed repairs. You'll likely need a specialist to make any necessary repairs to the foundation, as this kind of work is difficult and critical to your home's structural integrity.

Siding and exterior structures

Check for holes or warping in siding. If you have a wood exterior, look for signs of termite or carpenter ant damage, such as holes, or

actual insect activity. This is also the time to power wash siding, provided it's in good shape. If a gazebo, deck or other wood structure is looking worse for wear, spring is a good time to stain or seal.

Windows and doors

Look for holes and tears in screen doors and windows. If they need repairs (even small holes should be fixed), pick up a repair kit at your local home improvement store. Check the seals on windows and doors to be sure they are keeping out water and holding air.

Landscaping

Check concrete, asphalt or stone paths for damage. Check your water sprinkler system for broken, damaged or clogged sprinkler heads.

If you have landscapers perform seasonal maintenance on your sprinkler system, they will check for damage to the system and make any necessary repairs.

Air conditioning

Your AC system can suffer damage during from the winter elements. You'll want to be sure it's in working order before the warmer summer months arrive, so you aren't stuck without cooling.

Schedule maintenance by an HVAC specialist well in advance, as these services book up early.



PREPARATION can go a long way IN THE GARDEN

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

The work you put in making some basic preparations in the spring can pay off with a garden that performs well all season long.

Spring is the time to sharpen and repair tools, get the shed in order, plant bulbs and start your compost pile. Here are some tips to get you started.

Shed and tools

You could find some nasty surprises lurking inside your garden shed in spring, especially if it isn't lighted or heated during the winter. Rodents or other animals could have made their home there, or the structure might have suffered a leak or exposure to the elements. Once it's warm enough, venture into the shed to make any necessary repairs.

While you're there, sharpen tools with blades, such as shears, loppers and pruners, with a mill file, and oil those with moving parts. If any tools still have last year's dirt or mud on them, remove it with a garden hose and clean them in warm, soapy water. This will help prevent the spread of disease. Give the wheelbarrow a good cleaning, oil the wheels and tighten any wobbly bearings.

Inventory the shed for supplies you'll need in the coming year. Be sure you have fertilizers and soil amendments on hand for the season. Some supplies such as grass seed, might not hold up over time, so dispose of old product and replace it with new.

Plant and divide

Spring is the time not only to plant new bulbs for summer

and fall blooms but to divide any perennials that have gotten overgrown or crowded. Dividing them now will allow them to re-establish themselves in a new location and put down strong roots by the winter. In general, fall-blooming plants are best divided in the spring, but some plants should be divided just after they flower. Be sure to consult with local experts for your plants' needs.

This is also the time to put down new mulch. Dyed mulch, even those varieties intended to last for multiple seasons, typically needs to be replaced each spring. Mulching early will help prevent weed growth before they have time to sprout.

Remember that any organic material you remove from your flowerbeds when you clean them out in the spring to prepare for planting, such as leaves, foliage, stems and sticks, can help start your compost pile for the year.



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ADD STORAGE SPACE TO YOUR GARAGE

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The garage is a great place to store household items when they're not in use. Basic — but sturdy — shelving units can do the job.

If you're short on space in your garage, however, consider some creative storage options to maximize your storage space.

Suspended storage

Using the vertical space in your garage helps free up floor space.

Anything you don't access on a regular basis can be hoisted up. Look for bicycle storage systems that use rope and a pulley with hooks attached at the end to allow you to safely store your bikes overhead. A similar pulley system can be used to elevate a metal shelf where you can store items in plastic bins overhead. If you have access to a ladder, a fixed overhead storage shelf is also an option.

Wall storage

If you're short on floor space,

look for creative options for storing items such as bikes, and sports and lawn equipment on the wall. A modular wall-mounted slat storage system allows you to customize your storage for your particular items. Add hooks, wire baskets or shelves to the slats to store items of a variety of shapes and sizes — from a rake to a garden hose to a bicycle.

Even the inside of your garage door can be made into useful storage space. Attach metal brackets to hold light sports equipment such as fishing rods horizontally.

Function over form

Of course you could go all-out with a brand new customized garage storage system, but you don't have to spend a lot to make your space functional. If you're on a budget, consider hitting the classified ads, yard sales or a resale shop for garage storage options.

If you don't mind less than perfect aesthetics, look for quality items that might have some cosmetic defects. The key is to focus on being sure the storage units you choose are sturdy enough to hold your items.

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A 3D printer can be very useful for home repair and improvement projects.

In the past, once a molded plastic part was damaged, the only option was to replace it. If a replacement was unavailable, you were out of luck.

Today, with a 3D printer and the right kind of filament for the job, you can recreate parts that might otherwise have been difficult or impossible to find.

Getting started

An entry-level 3D printer can be had for around \$200. Popular starting models include the Creality Ender 3 V2 or the Monoprice Select Mini V2. Read online reviews to see how others use the printer for your intended purpose. You'll also find lots of great tips from the online maker community about how to get your machine up and running.

The right filament

When making parts, it's important to choose the right material for the job. There are many kinds of filaments, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, polylactic acid (PLA) filament can't hold up above 140 degrees Fahrenheit, so you shouldn't use it to make parts that will be used in higher-temperature applications.

Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) filament requires a higher temperature during the printing process, so it may not be usable in some entry-level machines, but it is durable and holds up over time. Do some research before buying a machine to be sure you can print with the kind of filament you need for your jobs.

Where to find designs

You can find pre-made design files for some applications via online 3D project databases such as Thingiverse.com or MyMiniFactory.com. A quick search turns up useful household items such as a wall shelf bracket, a power strip under-table mount, replacement wheels for a robotic vacuum, a miter saw box, replacement washing machine buttons, a vacuum cleaner dust bag clip and more.

If you can't find the design you need and you're willing to roll up your sleeves and learn a new skill, you can always design the part yourself. Download free or open-source computer-aided design software, such as TinkerCAD or FreeCAD, to get started. Again, the internet is your friend here, as there are myriad free tutorial videos and websites to help you get oriented.



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3D PRINTING ADDS NEW DIMENSION TO HOME PROJECTS

Share your designs

Once you've created your own design, you can share them for free or for profit via the internet. After all, if you needed a particular part, chances are others have

run into the same problem and are willing to pay. You can also print up some of your creations and sell them through platforms such as Etsy and eBay.

A \$200 printer and some inexpensive

filament could turn into a part-time money-making operation. Invest a little more and you could turn your side hustle into a full-time job. The sky is the limit.



Get kids involved with cleaning chores

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

If you're embarking on a cleaning project, getting the kids involved can teach responsibility and other valuable life skills.

Every parent knows that sometimes teaching a child to do a chore is more work than doing it yourself, but spending a little extra time now can help set them up to be great household helpers as they grow. An older child who develops useful skills such as bike repair or lawn maintenance could even open their own summer business.

Once your kids have new cleaning skills under their belts, they'll be able to help more around the house on an ongoing basis. This is a great time to institute a daily or weekly chore chart, if you haven't already.

For health and safety, have kids use all-natural cleaning supplies whenever possible, such as diluted vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice and toothpaste (for polishing metal surfaces such as doorknobs and fixtures).

Set each child up with a caddy of cleaning supplies they will need to complete their jobs. Here is a list of chore ideas for small hands to get you started.

Younger children

- Washing windows and windowsills.
- Sorting dirty laundry and removing clean laundry from the dryer.
- Dusting baseboards and furniture and

wiping down doorknobs and light switches.

- Wiping down kitchen cabinets.
- Sorting books and magazines.
- Sweeping, vacuuming and mopping.
- Pulling weeds and watering flowers and houseplants.
- Sort shoes and put away winter boots.
- Wipe down outdoor toys.
- Put away winter clothing and put out springtime wardrobe.
- Using a broom to remove cobwebs from porches and overhangs.

Older children

- Washing and vacuuming the car.
- Cleaning bathrooms.
- Cleaning and vacuuming under couch cushions.
- Clean out and wipe down refrigerator shelves and drawers.
- Deep cleaning microwave and stove.
- Changing bed sheets and laundering linens.
- Mowing the lawn and helping with yard work, such as weeding, planting bulbs or putting down mulch.
- Sweeping the patio or deck and wiping down outdoor furniture.
- Cleaning out pet kennels and laundering pet beds.
- Perform maintenance and make simple repairs to sports equipment and bicycles, such as airing up a basketball or replacing bicycle brakes.

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