

Spring Cleaning Checklist

In the days before modern conveniences, the first warm weather made it possible to do a sweeping housecleaning. After a long, hard winter, it must have felt great to throw open the windows and let the dust blow out, to wash walls down with water that didn't freeze, and to toss out your sour mattress ticking.

These days, most of us clean throughout the year, but there's no denying that the brighter sun and the longer days still invigorate us, filling us with the desire for a fresh start. Here are some suggestions for ways to kick off the warmest part of the year with renewed and refreshed surroundings:

Kitchen

- **Freezer.** Empty it completely and toss anything with freezer burn (grayish brown and dried-out). Dissolve 3 tablespoons baking soda in a quart of hot water. Using a soft, mesh sponge, wipe down the inside.
- **Refrigerator.** Repeat the freezer-cleaning process detailed above, but toss anything growing a culture.
- **Stove and oven.** Remove control knobs, burners, and spill catchers, and soak them in a sink of hot water, Dawn dishwashing detergent, and 1 tablespoon baking soda. Run the oven cleaning cycle or do it manually. Clean the stove top with nonabrasive scouring liquid.
- **Countertop appliances.** Thoroughly clean the toaster oven, blender, coffeemaker, and food processor. Run removable parts through the dishwasher or soak them in a sink of hot water and dish soap.
- **Behind the scenes.** Enlist help to pull out the stove and refrigerator. Vacuum, then mop around them. Vacuum out the refrigerator coils.
- **Sink.** Soak the drain cover in a bowl of hot water and dish soap. Pour a box of baking soda into the drain and let it sit for an hour. Then pour in distilled white vinegar to loosen any clogs, followed by a whole kettle of boiling water down the drain to flush out grease and debris.

Living Room

- **Declutter.** Put away items where they belong (shoes to closets, school books to bedroom shelves, quilts to linen closets). Enlist the help of everyone in the household to make this a regular task, weekly, or, even better, daily.
- **Shelves.** Dust knick-knacks and bookshelves. Remove each item, dust the shelves themselves, and then carefully dust each item before replacing.
- **Rugs and carpets.** Shampoo or steam-clean the rugs and wall-to-wall carpet. Vacuuming and spot-cleaning are for maintenance. The big clean must be done regularly. Have antique or precious rugs professionally cleaned.
- **Curtains and drapes.** Throw curtains in the laundry if their care labels indicate that it's safe. Send expensive drapes to the dry cleaner.
- **Lamps.** Dust the bases and wipe off any greasy areas with a solution of hot water and distilled white vinegar, making sure to dry thoroughly with a clean towel. Dust or vacuum the shades.

- **TVs and computer monitors.** Clean screens by wiping them down with a microfiber cloth lightly dampened with distilled water. Dust the plastic parts, then wipe down with a vinegar-and-water solution as needed, avoiding electronic components. Use compressed air to dust in crevices.

Bathroom

- **Medicine cabinet.** Toss expired medications and deteriorating cosmetics. Take inventory. Wipe down the interiors, then clean the mirrors.
- **Fans and vents.** Take them apart with a screwdriver and soak individual pieces in a solution of hot water and Dawn dishwashing detergent.
- **Shower curtain.** Replace the interior liner and machine wash the shower curtain.
- **Towels and washcloths.** Make rags of the ones with frays or stains, or donate them to an animal shelter, where they'll be used for bedding.
- **Floor.** Scrub the floor with a brush. A flick with a wet mop is fine for maintenance, but you'll need some elbow grease to really get the scum out of cracks and crevices.
- **Drain.** Pour a box of baking soda into the drain and let it sit for an hour. Then pour a whole kettle of boiling water down the drain to flush out grease and debris.
- **Showerhead.** De-scum the showerhead. If you can easily remove the head, soak it in a sink filled with a solution of half distilled white vinegar and half boiling water. Once the water has fully cooled, scrub it with a stiff brush. If you can't remove the showerhead, fill a heavy-duty zip-top freezer bag with vinegar and warm water and tie it to the pipe with kitchen twine or a rubber band. Let it hang there overnight. Remove the bag and scrub the showerhead with a stiff brush, taking care not to scratch the finish.

Bedroom

- **Mattress.** Strip the mattress of bedding and lay it in the sun on a clean blanket in the backyard (if you have one!). Mark which side was last facing up; if your mattress is not a pillow top, flip it.
- **Pillows.** Machine wash them, if possible. Most down- and fiber-filled pillows can go through the wash (check the label). Don't overstuff the machine; run one or two pillows through per cycle, using gentle detergent. Make sure all pillows are completely dry to avoid mildew.
- **Dressers and armoires.** Remove all items from the interior. Vacuum and dust inside cabinets and drawers.
- **Bed linens.** Wash pillow shams, the mattress pad, the bed skirt, and the duvet cover. Check labels; send anything not machine washable to the dry cleaner.
- **Windows.** Use a bucket filled with warm water and a drop of dish soap, and a soft, microfiber cloth. Be sure to do the sills and frames. Finish by washing the panes with a non-streaking glass cleaner.
- **Blinds and curtains.** Vacuum blinds using your vacuum's wand attachment and machine wash curtains or send them to the dry cleaner.

Closets

- **Take inventory and declutter.** Go through each item in your closet. Decide if you are going to keep, donate, or trash the contents, one piece at a time. For items you are keeping stored away, make a list of the contents and whereabouts.

- **Seasonal clothing.** Rotate seasonal clothing and store what's not needed.
- **Boxes and trunks.** Label the contents on all sides, as well as on the top.
- **Regroup.** Organize your clothes by color, type, or use.
- **Shelves.** Remove all items and clean as needed, vacuum and dust the shelves, then reshelve the items.
- **Floor.** Vacuum and mop the floor.

Around the House

- **Metal fixtures.** Clean and polish all brass and metal fixtures, including outdoor doorknobs, the door knocker, pot and pan racks, and finials.
- **Wood.** Using proper wood soap and wax, clean fine woods, including banisters, finials, and art pieces.
- **Wall hangings.** Remove mirrors, wall art, and photos from the wall. Dust around them, clean the frames, and then clean the glass.
- **Air-conditioning filters.** If you don't have disposable filters, gently pull out each filter and rinse it with warm water in the bathtub. For spot-cleaning, use a small brush and some dish soap diluted in hot water. Allow them to dry, then pop them back into place.
- **Light switches.** Fill a bucket with a gallon of hot water, a drop of dishwashing detergent, and ½ cup white vinegar. Wipe down every switch and switch plate in the house.
- **Doorknobs.** Fill a bucket with hot water and household cleaner. Wipe down every doorknob inside the house.