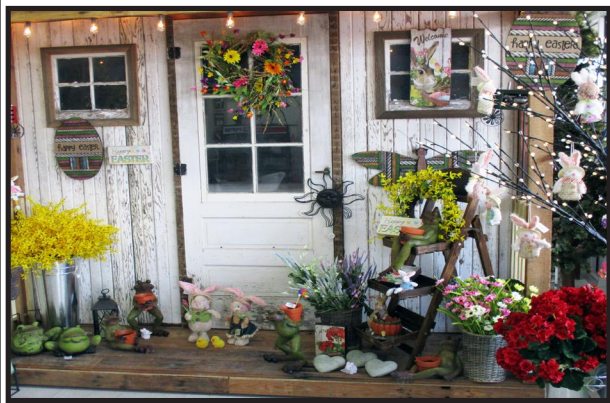


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Six easy spring cleaning projects

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, countertops 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 freshened 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 vinegar-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 heat-

ed 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

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.

Avoid aches and pains when gardening

People who have not spent much time in a garden may not consider this rewarding hobby much of a threat to their health. But as veteran gardeners can attest, gardening can contribute to nagging aches and pains that can force even the most ardent green-thumbs indoors.

Gardening is a physical activity that, despite its peaceful nature, can be demanding on the body. Thankfully, there are several ways that gardening enthusiasts can prevent the aches and pains that can sometimes pop up after long days in the garden.

- Use ergonomic gardening tools. Ergonomic gardening tools are designed to prevent the types of aches, pains and injuries that can cut gardeners' seasons short. Gardening injuries can affect any area of the body, but injuries or aches and pains affecting the back, wrists and hands are among the

most common physical problems gardeners endure. Look for ergonomic tools that reduce the strain on these areas of the body. Even arthritis sufferers who love

ers finish their gardening sessions. Breaks help to alleviate muscles or joints that can become overtaxed when gardening for long, uninterrupted periods of time. When



leaning down or working on your hands and knees, stand up to take breaks every 20 minutes or the moment aches

and pains start to make their presence felt.

- Maintain good posture. Back injuries have a tendency to linger, which can keep gardeners indoors and out of their gardens. When gardening, maintain good posture to prevent back injuries. Gardening back braces can protect the back by providing support and making it easier for gardeners to maintain their posture.

- Alternate tasks. Repetitive-strain injuries can affect gardeners who spend long periods of time performing the same activity in their gardens. By alternating tasks during gardening sessions, gardeners can reduce their risk of suffering repetitive strain injuries. Alternate tasks not just on muscle groups worked, but also level of difficulty. Remember to include some simple jobs even on busy gardening days so the body gets a break.

- Take frequent breaks. Frequent breaks can help combat the stiffness and muscle aches that may not appear until garden-

ers finish their gardening sessions. Breaks help to alleviate muscles or joints that can become overtaxed when gardening for long, uninterrupted periods of time. When

- Maintain good posture. Back injuries have a tendency to linger, which can keep gardeners indoors and out of their gardens. When gardening, maintain good posture to prevent back injuries. Gardening back braces can protect the back by providing support and making it easier for gardeners to maintain their posture. Tool pouches attached to gardening stools or chairs also can be less taxing on the back than gardening belts tied around the waist.

Gardening might not be a contact sport, but it can cause pain if gardeners do not take steps to prevent the onset of muscle aches and strains when spending time in their gardens.

Did you know?

Paving stones are used around the house in many different applications, including on walkways and patios. Sometimes, however, paving stones are beyond homeowners' budgets. Fortunately, there's another alternative that may look just as attractive and save homeowners money. Stamped concrete, also called textured or imprinted concrete, is a design element that replicates the look of stone, brick, wood, slate, or other materials in concrete. Stamped concrete can be used for patios, sidewalks, driveways, and pool decks. Stamped concrete also may be incorporated into interior flooring designs. Homeowners can explore their options with regard to stamped concrete by speaking with a masonry expert or landscape architect.

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