



Leave carpet and upholstery shampooing to the professionals, as excess moisture can contribute to mold and dust mites, which aggravate allergy symptoms.

Spring cleaning can alleviate allergies

Allergies affect people of all ages. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology reports that allergic rhinitis affects between 10 and 30 percent of the world's population. In addition, the prevalence of allergic diseases has risen in industrialized nations for more than 50 years.

Seasonal allergies tend to be the strongest in spring and autumn. Allergies can be exacerbated by many factors, including in homes where improvements are being made. Regular house-cleaning can remove many common allergy triggers and help alleviate symptoms. Knowing which common home improvement mistakes can aggravate allergies can help homeowners avoid them.

Suit up

Before any cleaning begins, allergy sufferers should don face masks and rubber gloves to prevent themselves from breathing in allergens or having them touch their hands, where they can be transferred to the face or elsewhere. Those cleaning should also wear

clothes that can be easily removed and laundered after a day's work.

Clean windows singularly

Prolonged exposure to outdoor allergens, such as pollen, mold or ragweed, can aggravate allergies. Therefore, if windows are being cleaned, do one at a time and then promptly close the window. Having the air conditioning running can help filter the air as well.

Use exhaust fans

The AAAAI recommends using an exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathrooms to reduce the levels of moisture in these rooms and filter out potential allergens and odors. Moisture can eventually lead to the growth of mold and mildew, which isn't healthy for anyone, including allergy sufferers, to breathe in.

Invest in a HEPA filter

Vacuums with HEPA filters can trap allergens that are so small that they pass through regular vacuum filters. That means instead of containing them, these

small particles are only being shot back into the air where they are easily breathed in. WebMD suggests vacuuming once or twice a week to keep carpets and floors as clean as possible. Plus, don't forget to vacuum upholstered furniture and drapes as well.

Launder with hot water

When it comes time to wash linens, do so in hot water, which can kill dust mites residing in sheets and blankets. Employ mattress covers to further protect against dust mite allergies.

Shampoo smart

Shampooing a carpet may cause moisture to become trapped in the carpet fibers, leading to increased dust mites or mold growth. Spot-clean stains instead. Otherwise, hire a professional cleaner who will clean and dry the carpet as quickly as possible.

Damp dusting is better

When cleaning up dust or home renovation debris, use a damp cloth or a vinegar solution to wipe down surfaces. This helps trap small particles instead of sending them into the air.

Treat mold issues

Mold can trigger allergic reactions, so it is best to keep it out of a home. Solutions that contain at least 10 percent bleach can be effective at killing mold, but it's best to prevent mold from growing entirely. That means keeping tabs of any moisture issues and addressing them immediately.

Allergies can be problematic, but routine home cleaning in the right way can help alleviate symptoms.

Treating lawns during drought or dry periods

"Drought" can be a four-letter word to many lawn-care enthusiasts. Homeowners who put in the hours and hard work to create beautiful, lush lawns can see the fruits of all their labor gradually disappear when drought sets in. That can be both frustrating to homeowners and detrimental to long-term lawn health.

Treating lawns during drought or dry periods can be tricky, as some homeowners may be forced to adhere to water restrictions established by their local governments. Still, there are some ways to obey the law and still help lawns withstand drought and dry periods.

• **Postpone fertilizer applications.** Fertilizers are designed to help grass grow, but growing grass needs water it won't have access to when water restrictions have been put in place. If a lawn needs to be ferti-

lized during drought or dry periods, homeowners should consult with lawn-care professionals, who may have experience applying fertilizer during drought. Profes-

sionals also may have access to more fertilizing products than homeowners will find at nearby lawn and garden centers.

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Prepare HVAC systems for warmer days ahead

The arrival of a new season can be an exciting time. Homeowners may have renewed vigor to start home renovation projects or even tackle some cleaning and organization tasks. Before the weather starts to warm up too much, homeowners may want to evaluate their home cooling needs and ensure that all equipment is in good working order.

Spring air conditioning inspections and tuneups are essential steps in system performance. Homeowners should not take for granted that a system that performed optimally last year will do so this year when temperatures climb. Various factors, including weather damage, dust and grime, mechanical wear and tear, and even rodent or insect infestations, can compromise HVAC systems. Since HVAC systems have so many moving parts, a thorough inspection of such systems can save headaches and money down the road.

According to Heating Ontario, the extreme weather conditions that come along with fall and winter can be especially taxing on homes and the systems that keep them comfortable. During a spring visit, an HVAC technician will perform maintenance on the air conditioner and make sure it is ready for the heat of summertime. This maintenance may include cleaning the unit, checking controls, calibrating the thermostat, lubricating moving parts, checking refrigerant levels, tightening electrical connections, and clearing any clogs. Homeowners are urged to also change the filter at the start of the cooling season.

Correcting any issues in the HVAC system well in advance of the arrival of warm weather can help ensure comfort when air conditioning is needed. As an added advantage, homeowners should install programmable thermostats if they do not already have them to keep cooling as cost- and energy-efficient as possible.

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