

Six easy spring cleaning projects



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.

Spring cleaning tasks can be stretched out across several days to make the jobs more manageable. 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.

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. 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 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. 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 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.

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Prevent disease in the garden

No garden is immune to disease. Even the most attentive, experienced gardeners have had to confront disease in their gardens, which can lead to significant damage and potentially kill plants.

Various bacterial, fungal and viral diseases can affect gardens. Fungicides, which are chemicals that destroy fungus, are only rarely recommended to combat disease. In fact, a proactive approach rooted in prevention is often the most effective way to reduce risk for disease in gardens.

• Choose the right varieties of plant. Choosing disease-resistant varieties is an effective way to prevent disease in gardens. Gardeners who have confronted disease in their gardens in the past should do their best to identify which diseases were present and then choose plants that are considered

resistant to those diseases. A local garden center professional can help gardeners who are uncertain about what to plant.

• Plant in the right spots. The choice of where to plant is significant. Avoid wet areas with insufficient drainage. The home renovation experts at HGTV note that wet soil can decrease plants' chances for survival because of excess water and a lack of oxygen. If the only spots available for planting tend to be especially wet, consider planting in raised beds or having a French drain installed. Learn how much light plants need prior to planting them. Some can thrive in shady areas, while others require ample sunlight each day.

• Plant at the right time. Planting too early when the soil is not yet warm enough can make plants vulnerable to disease by

weakening their ability to fight.

• Harvest on time. When planting vegetables, it's imperative that the vegetables are harvested on time. The University of Georgia Extension notes that fully mature vegetables left on the plant attract disease and are vulnerable to insect infestations.

• Control insect infestations. Certain insects can spread disease, so it's important that gardeners learn to recognize which insects pose a threat to their plants. Speak with a local gardening center about invasive insects and how to address infestations without harming the plant.

As the planting season approaches, gardeners can take various steps to make their plants and vegetables less vulnerable to disease.

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