



Spring Cleaning and Organization

By LYNN MACHON



Stylish Ways to Refresh Your Home This Spring

Spring is here. Time to throw open those windows and let the sun shine in. After our long winter hibernation, springtime is often a period of personal renewal. What better time to refresh our homes with a little spring cleaning?

Most of us do (or dictate) a major house-cleaning session on some level each year. Whether a complete overhaul of the garage, or a seasonal closet rotation, tackling substantial maintenance projects once or twice a year goes hand in hand with owning a home. While some of us truly enjoy the experience of spring cleaning, others submit to it because we know accumulated dirt and repairs left untended can lead to a costlier mess down the line.

Getting Started

Whatever your motivation, start your spring cleaning adventure with a simple walk around your home, writing down all things that need to be renewed, repaired, replaced or removed. While most projects will be obvious to the eye, the list below may help remind you of less common chores.

As you create your master "Spring Cleaning To-Do" list, make notes on how each project will get done. Can you do it yourself? Do you need the assistance of your brother-in-law or neighbor? What tools/equipment will you need? Finally, would it be more cost-effective (and safer) to hire a professional?

Remember, don't let the list overwhelm you, spring cleaning isn't supposed to be accomplished in one day. So break the list into a daily grouping of 3-5 items and just tackle them project by project.

Clear the Clutter

Clutter (n): a confused or disordered state or collection; a jumble.

One of the first tasks on many spring cleaning lists is to purge clutter, those items that are unwanted, outgrown or unused. By its mere presence alone, clutter causes stress and can affect your mood and health. And according to Feng Shui practitioners, clutter is a big energy zapper too.





Periodically purge – Keep a designated basket or container for catalogues and magazines. Once a month, toss or rotate.

Getting rid of clutter is essential, says Holly Graff, a Certified Professional Organizer and president of Clutter Control Angels. "You can't let your stuff control you, you have to control your stuff."

Unless you are a certified compulsive hoarder (don't scoff – an estimated one million in the United States are), most of us simply have problem areas in the house that despite best intentions seem to attract clutter like a magnet.

Graff likes to cite "Pareto's 80/20 Rule" – 20 percent of what we have, we use 80 percent of the time. Whether the culprit is clothes, files or toys, Graff notes the other 80 percent is likely clutter that can be either used by someone else or tossed.

She offers the following game plan for clearing clutter.

Start with a Vision and a Plan

Visualize how you want your home, room, or trouble spot to look. Decide when you want to accomplish your cleaning task, and how you want to tackle it.



Take Action

Once you make a commitment, write it on your calendar to stay focused. Start small, tackling clutter in 20-30 minute sessions. Most importantly, says Graff, start now. Procrastination only causes more stress and mental clutter. A great idea for those with children is to schedule a family cleaning day.

Sort & Categorize

The next step, says Graff, is the most significant.

"Begin in one area, and gather and categorize like items together." In the garage, it may be sporting goods, automotive or gardening. Not only will you see quick results, she notes, but also see what you tend to accumulate.

Love It or Lose It

Once items are sorted, the successful clutter busting session relies on making hard-core decisions. Says Graff, "Decide immediately what you'll keep and what you'll donate or toss." As you review each item or collection, take the personal, sentimental attachment out of it. This is a war on clutter, so be militant.

Donations to Charity

It's always easier to let go of something when you know it's going to someone who needs it. Shelters, hospice stores, the Salvation Army and Goodwill are all good local charities. Schools and churches may know of additional families in need. Furniture for

Families will pick up beds, couches, dressers and tables.

Set aside a special donation box for your family to use throughout the year for outgrown clothing and toys.

The Paper Jam

How ironic that in today's electronic society, paper continues cause us undue stress. Many people confess that the constant accumulation of bills, school projects and catalogues, consumes their time and patience.

Graff offers several solutions for relieving the paper jam and preventing it from reoccurring.

- Create a mail center – deal with papers as they come in – toss, file or act.
- Purchase a desktop shredder – shred junk mail, old receipts as you go.
- Sort papers into like categories – bills, magazines, recipes, warranties, etc.
- Establish a filing system – vertical files and binders for temporary storage – bills to be paid, projects in progress. Utilize file cabinets for permanent files – taxes, financial documents, mortgage paperwork.
- Contain school work – Use clear containers for each child for special projects, artwork, report cards. Keep only the "best of the best".
- Periodically purge – Keep a designated basket or container for catalogues and magazines. Once a month, toss or rotate.

Think Before You Toss

For items that can't be recycled or donated, the trashcan seems the only option. But before you toss, a word of caution: Certain items require special care.

Hazardous Waste – Paint, pesticides, cleaners, batteries, and fluorescent lights can be disposed of only at certified sites. There is free household hazardous waste collection every 1st and 3rd Saturday morning of the month, at the El Dorado Hills Fire Department off Bass Lake Road.

Universal Waste/E-Waste: Electronics such as computers, televisions, radios, phones and copiers also are prohibited from our landfills but can be recycled and reused. Goodwill is now certified to take e-waste, or for other disposal options, visit erecycle.org.

Prevent Identify Theft: Remember to shred junk mail, old bills and any documents with personal information.

Watch for additional recycling and waste collection events surrounding Earth Day in April.

CLEANING GREEN

Many cleaning products contain chlorine, phosphates, ammonia and petroleum – toxic chemicals that are harmful to our environment. Today there are options available for earth friendly cleaning using floor cleaners, dish soap, laundry detergent and window cleaners that are non-toxic, non-polluting, biodegradable and phosphate-free. Several brands are now available at Costco.

You also can make your own green cleaners using common household items such as lemons, baking soda, vinegar or hydrogen peroxide. See www.greenlivingtips.com to learn how.



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Clearing Your Personal Cobwebs

In the same way physical clutter causes stress, mental clutter (that ongoing chatter of stuff we need to remember and stuff we need to forget) can be overwhelming and sabotage your productivity. If you've ever gotten to the end of a day feeling you've accomplished nothing but are completely exhausted, try these simple suggestions to help clear your mind:

- Create a routine for physical and mental exercise — incorporate a brisk walk and a “brain teaser” puzzle into your day.
- Maintain a balanced and nutritious diet. Try yoga or meditative breathing for inner peace.
- Learn to say “no” to those activities that monopolize your time and keep you from what you enjoy.
- Write down your “to do” list — then tackle the projects one by one so they don't invade your subconscious.
- Identify and confront any nagging thoughts of guilt, fear, worry or unfulfilled expectations. Then commit now to resolve them or let them go.

Let's Get Cleaning

Whew! Now that you've cleared out the old stuff, it's time to get the shine on. Whether you do it yourself, hire a professional service to handle it, or tackle spring cleaning as a combination of the two, there are essential tasks experts say should be done once or twice a year to keep a home healthy.

Inside the Home

Carpet and area rugs — surface wash what you can, send the rest to the dry cleaners or call a professional service.

Window treatments — dust blinds and shutters, professionally clean drapes. Repair cords, pulley systems.

Ceiling fans, chandeliers — dust and replace bulbs.

Comforters, blankets and duvet covers — professionally dry clean and then store them until next winter.

Walls, wall pop outs, baseboards — dust and wipe down with a degreaser.

Bathrooms — clean shower doors, scrub grout and scour toilets. Soak shower heads in a product like “CLR” to remove mineral buildup.

Kitchen — clean oven, sanitize disposal with baking soda, scour around compactor, de-scale coffee maker.

Gathering Spaces — move large furniture, vacuum and dust underneath. Clean floors and treat per manufacturer's recommendation.

Couches/chairs — remove cushions and vacuum, spot clean where needed.

Wood cabinets — wipe down inside and out, tighten hinges.

Home Office — shred old tax files, dust machines.

Computer — purge and organize downloaded photos, backup important files. Run a ‘clean up’ program to increase memory.

Along with the obvious cleaning projects, spring is a good time for a fresh start in other areas of your home:

Filters — Clean or replace furnace, air filters.

Light bulbs — replace those in hard to reach areas.

Batteries — test and replace in smoke detectors, alarms.

Dryer — clean the vent and exhaust areas. Inspect hoses.

Pantry — check dates, purge stale, expired items.

Medicine cabinet — toss expired prescriptions, but not down the drain or toilet.

Instead, fill tablet/capsule bottles with water and recap to destroy.

Garbage cans — clean bottoms and sides with degreaser.

Freezer — Reduce packages, toss anything you haven't used or can't recognize.

Pets — clean or replace bedding, toys and food dishes.

Outside the Home

While much attention is paid to spring cleaning indoors, the outside of your home may need care as well.

Fortunately, your labor of love shouldn't include yard work. According to Mark Siders, who handles many Serrano yards as owner of G&M Landscape Maintenance, the bulk of major yard care projects — pruning, mulching, fertilizing and weeding — is done prior to spring. But if those tasks haven't yet been taken care of, now's the time.

Next, concentrate your efforts on the exterior and patio areas, noting any areas that need attention.

Front Entry — Even though you rarely use it, your guests do. Clean the front door, add new flowers, hose down cobwebs and replace light bulbs.

Grill and fireplace — clean the grill, remove ashes, check the chimney

Outdoor furniture — clean, repair or replace cushions.

Windows — clean inside and out. Don't forget the screens.

Weather stripping and seals — inspect and replace if needed.

Gutters/drains — clear debris.

Tiles — repair or replace loose or damaged tiles.

Stucco — repair cracks, remove dirt and cobwebs with a water hose and light scrubbing.

Doors — use WD-40 to lubricate door hinges and windows.

Garage doors — apply penetrating oil to rollers and hinges.



Spring Cleaning Serrano-Style

In Serrano, the annual rite of spring cleaning presents additional challenges for many homeowners.

Putting Greens

While most feature artificial turf, annual maintenance is still required. To care for their putting green, John and Rena Williams blow off any debris, brush the surface with a stiff bristled brush, add a UV protector, and use a stimp meter to measure the ball speed, adjusting with sand to reach "Serrano Speed".

Media Rooms

To keep home theaters operating brightly, Brian Smith, a partner with El Dorado Home Theater, suggests homeowners lightly dust television screens with a clean microfiber cloth, and use a vacuum attachment or a can of compressed air to dislodge dust in and around equipment cabinets.

Wine Cellars

Homeowners with liquid assets can protect their investment each spring by double-checking their cellar's thermometer gage, adjusting the humidistat, vacuuming cooling fins and dry mopping the floor as needed.



Once the tiles, gutters, stucco, windows and doors are polished and pretty, you've earned a restful round on your freshly refurbished putting green!

Staying Organized

There is no question an organized life provides a greater sense of peace and calm. What's more, all the work you've already done purging will be wasted time unless a system is in place to ensure the clutter doesn't creep back in.

The key to organization, says Graff, is simply having a home for everything. And, she adds, if you take it out, put it back. "It takes seconds to put something back right away, but minutes if you do it later. And minutes add up."

In fact, it's estimated that most of us lose one full hour a day searching for something, whether it's keys, a file, or a phone number, that wasn't put back properly in the first place.

Graff says there are many different organization styles and it's important to find the system that works best for you.

Once your system is in place, two simple things will help you stay on track: use a daily "to do" list, and take 15 minutes before bed to put items away.

Organization by Design

Being organized is just a way of life for Cheryl and Mike Mellow. So, when they designed their new home, they had organization built right into two key areas.

The Mellow's master bedroom closet is truly a masterpiece. Larger than a normal-sized room, it features knotty alder built-in armoires from Home-style Cabinets. "We wanted our master closet to be as fabulous as the rest of our home," says Cheryl. There's also a sit-down bench that opens to reveal a cedar-lined compartment for storing dry cleaning.

In another part of their home, the Mellows designed a "Christmas Room" as part of their six-car garage. Stacked floor to ceiling with shelves, the room houses all season décor in color-coded containers along with several artificial trees.

"I absolutely love this room," Cheryl laughs. "The only thing better would be if it was heated."

Garages can be organized by design as well. When John Williams looks inside his garage, he admits, "I really want to see just cars and cabinets. I don't like clutter and I love storage." It shows. In fact, the Williams' garage is cleaner than most people's kitchens.

So this spring as you welcome the warm weather and look for ways to be renewed, turn to your home for inspiration. There's probably an opportunity to make a fresh start under every nook and cranny. ☑

PHOTOS BY SUMME VESBY

