

Spring Cleaning

Never Too Late



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As the temperatures start to warm up and the snow begins to disappear, and as the hours of daylight extend, that feeling of spring starts to arise. The return of spring often brings a sense of new beginnings, new growth, or a fresh start. For many, this also means a time for spring-cleaning: the undertaking of cleaning one's living space.

Spring cleaning. Did you just cringe? If not, I imagine that you didn't jump for joy either. Spring cleaning is often not a desired activity, though most can agree that once it's done, you do feel satisfied.

Here are several tips to help with your spring cleaning.

Simplify

Limit or remove some of the pressure in feeling that you need to do it all at once, and take it step by step. Start with one room at a time, or one category at a time (ex. clothes, photos, books, pantry items) or divide up the work over several weekends or throughout the week.

Enlist the help of others! If you live with other people, encourage them to help out in some way. Also, make it more fun by putting on some music (and maybe even take a few minutes for a dance party!).

Do your best to keep up with regular cleaning during the rest of the year, so that it is less overwhelming and not just a yearly event.

When going through your possessions, it can be helpful to determine what you use on a regular basis and what you don't, and whether or not those items are serving you or "sparking joy" (as discussed in a helpful resource called *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* by Marie Kondo). Also, keep in mind that there are other categories besides "throw away" when going through your possessions. See if you can reuse or repurpose, recycle, or donate items before throwing them in the garbage.

Clean Up Your Cleaning Products

Did you know that our indoor environment is two to five times more toxic than our outdoor environment? Even the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that nearly 3% of the global burden of disease is attributed to indoor air pollution. Also, we can spend as much as 90% of our time indoors. There are many possible sources of pollutants found inside the home, including dust (which is a reservoir for chemicals in the home) and even the products we use to clean our homes!

Most conventional cleaning products contain chemicals that can affect our health, so before you begin cleaning, start by removing those cleaning products that can increase your overall exposure and body burden of harmful chemicals.

What to look for and avoid in your cleaning products:

Chemical	Found in
Triclosan	Dish soaps, disinfectants, numerous other household products. Look for triclosan listed as an “active ingredient” in many antibacterial products.
Formaldehyde	Floor polishes, scouring cleansers, disinfectants, liquid cleansers, laundry aids, air fresheners, carpet cleaners (as well as numerous other household items and furniture, personal-care products, wrinkle-free clothing).
Quaternary ammonium compounds or “quats”	Bathroom-cleaning products, all-purpose cleaners, fabric softeners, degreasers.
Ammonia	Window cleaners, drain cleaners, toilet cleaners, bathroom cleaners, oven cleaners, car polish, stainless-steel cleaners, all-purpose cleaners.
2-Butoxyethanol (2-BE, also known as butyl cellosolve)	Glass cleaners, laundry-stain removers, carpet cleaners, automobile cleaners, windshield-wiper fluid, degreasers, oven cleaners, rust removers.
Parabens	Various cleaning products (and most cosmetics/personal-care products).
Phthalates	Various fragranced cleaning products, including air fresheners, dish soap, even toilet paper (and most cosmetics/personal-care products).
Sodium laurylsulfate (SLS) and sodium laurethsulfate (SLES)	Dish soap, liquid laundry detergents, cleaning towelettes, toilet-bowl cleaners (also in cosmetics or products that form “suds”).

Fragrance or perfume (catch-all terms for masking potentially harmful chemicals)	Most types of cleaning products
MEA (monoethanolamine), DEA (diethanolamine), TEA (triethanolamine)	Floor cleaners, car-wash products, degreasers, liquid laundry detergents, dish soap, oven cleaners, glass and surface cleaners.
Coal tar dyes	Most types of cleaning products.
Phosphates	Dishwasher detergents, laundry detergents, bathroom cleaners.
Nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs)	Stain removers, all-purpose cleaners, air fresheners, liquid laundry detergents, degreasers, toilet-bowl cleaners, car-wash products.
Silica powder	Abrasive cleaning powders.
Sodium dichloroisocyanurate dihydrate	Toilet-bowl cleaners, surface cleaners, disinfectants, deodorizers.
Sodium hydroxide (also known as lye and caustic soda)	Oven cleaners, bathroom cleaners, drain openers, toilet-bowl cleaners, disinfectants.
Trisodium nitrilotriacetate	Bathroom cleaners, some laundry detergents (more common in industrial formulations).

For more information on these chemicals (what they are and how they are harmful), check out the David Suzuki Foundation's article at <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/health/science/toxics/the-dirt-on-toxic-chemicals-in-household-cleaning-products/>

You really don't need that whole collection of cleaning products meant for cleaning various parts of your home like your windows, bathroom, toilet, floors, kitchen counters, and so forth. You can use a few DIY multipurpose products to get the job done! See below for a simple citrus-vinegar cleaner recipe.

For more DIY nontoxic home cleaning recipes, check out Meghan Telpner's article at <http://www.meghantelpner.com/blog/10-non-toxic-home-cleaning-recipes/> and David Suzuki Foundation's resource at <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2011/QueenOfGreen-Green-cleaning-recipes.pdf>

For more information on "greener cleaners" that you can purchase, check out Environmental Working Group's website at <http://www.ewg.org/guides/cleaners>

Don't Forget Your Internal Environment!

Spring cleaning need not apply only to the home or external environment. It can also apply to your internal environment, including your thoughts.

Reflect upon the various areas of your life—relationships, work, friendships, personal life—and examine any area that may be weighing you down. Notice your thoughts about those particular areas, and what physical response you have to those thoughts (ex. sadness, anxiety, frustration, etc.). Our thoughts create feelings or emotions, which then can lead to actions and behaviours. When we can start to interrupt those unhelpful, negative and self-defeating thought–feeling–action cycles with tools like breathing, we can start to begin to challenge those thoughts and redirect our thoughts to a more neutral place, or to thoughts that feel better and thoughts that reflect more positive truths (such as “I did the best I could,” or “I am enough”).

The simple act of breathing is cleansing, where oxygen is brought into the lungs during inhalation and carbon dioxide is released during exhalation. Throughout your day, pause and take a few deep breaths. To help focus on your breathing, inhale to the count of five, pause, and exhale to the count of five; then repeat.

DIY Citrus Vinegar Cleaner Recipe (from In Sonnet's Kitchen)

Use this as a cleaner for windows, glass, counters and mopping floors.

Ingredients and Supplies

- Citrus peels (ex. lemons, oranges, limes)
- Glass jar
- White vinegar
- Spray bottle

Instructions

- Cut the peel off of the citrus fruit, and place in the glass jar.
- Cover with vinegar and allow to sit, for up to two weeks.
- Remove the peels and dilute vinegar 1:1 with water.
- Pour into spray bottle.

Note

You can also mix the vinegar/water mixture with a small amount of castile soap (ex. Dr. Bronner's soap) or baking soda for more cleaning power.

In a time pinch? Skip the citrus peels and two week wait time. Just dilute the vinegar

1:1 with water and you're ready to go!

Resources

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