

Spring Cleaning 101



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SPRING CLEANING CHECKLIST

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CLEAN RUGS, CARPETS, AND FLOORS

Vacuum rugs and carpets. Machine-wash or dry-clean area rugs (check label for manufacturer's directions), and shampoo wall-to-wall carpeting. Wash and wax floors. (See page 3 for more tips.)

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CLEAN SHADES AND CURTAINS

Take down window treatments. Dust slat blinds, and launder curtains and fabric shades: Either hand-wash and lightly steam in place, or send to a dry cleaner.

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WASH WINDOWS

Remove dust, dirt, and cobwebs with a soft brush. Wash windows inside and out with a mild dilution of either ammonia or white vinegar in water; dry with a squeegee followed by a rag. (See page 4 for more tips.)

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REPLACE STORM WINDOWS WITH SCREENS

Remove storm windows; replace cracked panes, recaulk windows, and repaint the frames before storing. Before installing screens, repair holes with tweezers (or replace entire screen).

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RENEW MATTRESSES AND CUSHIONS

Vacuum mattresses and box springs. Rotate and flip mattresses before replacing them on the box springs. Flip sofa and chair cushions. (See page 5 for tips on removing stains from upholstered furniture.)

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SORT THROUGH WARDROBES

Separate clothes into piles: off-season, donation, dry cleaner, tailor. Wash and mend clothing before putting back in closet or storing. (See page 6 for tips on removing stains from clothing.)

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CLEAN REFRIGERATOR AND FREEZER

Unplug refrigerator; discard any items past their prime. Store food in a cooler, then wash fridge from top to bottom with warm, sudsy water. Add baking soda to water to deodorize surfaces. (See page 7 for more tips on cleaning home appliances.)

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PERFORM A SAFETY CHECK

Check smoke detector batteries frequently; replace every six months. Test batteries in carbon-monoxide detectors and flashlights; inspect pressure gauges on fire extinguishers.

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REPLACE FILTERS

Vacuum and clean grates, coils, and condensers on furnaces, refrigerators, stoves, and air conditioners. Remove filters in furnaces and air conditioners, and either clean or replace them.

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MAINTAINING FLOORS

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For any floor, vacuuming is the first step. Do this as often as daily and at least once a week; dust-mop for a quick fix. Removing the everyday accumulation of dirt makes mopping and waxing less arduous.

The next step depends upon the type and finish of the floor. Here are some specific tips to follow.

Wood Floors	If floors are waxed, re-apply wax once or twice a year, and buff in between to revive the shine. Waxed wood should not be mopped—a wax seal is not watertight, and liquid could cause damage. Wipe spills with damp paper towels as soon as they hit the floor, and buff the area with a soft cloth. For wood floors with a polyurethane finish, damp-mop with a combination of 1 quart water and 1/4 cup vinegar.
Vinyl Floors	Wax vinyl forty-eight hours after installation and about every six months thereafter. Apply wax sparingly directly on the floor, and spread it into a very thin coat using long, straight strokes with a wax applicator or sponge mop. Open windows, and let dry to a shine. Damp-mopping with warm water brightens a less soiled floor; wet-mopping with vinyl-floor cleaner removes more substantial grime. Remove wax buildup with stripper about once a year.
Marble, Ceramic Tile, and Stone Floors	Masonry floors require care similar to that of vinyl, with the addition of an early step: sealing. Apply an all-purpose masonry-floor sealer (available at hardware stores) with a sponge mop or clean rags, following package directions. Once sealed, a stone floor should be waxed about once a year with an acrylic liquid or paste wax. To clean, damp-mop with water and mild soap, such as Ivory Liquid; rinse with clean water. After one or two waxings, repeat the process from the beginning: strip, seal, and re wax.

General Floor Care Advice

Give your floors a break. When you move anything, always lift and place; never slide. For heavy objects, slip a square of carpet, pile side down, under the points touching the floor (or try EZ Glide surface protectors). Attach felt or nylon glides to legs, and check the glides occasionally for dirt, which can scratch the floor.

Mopping Tip From Martha

Replace old string mops and dust mops. Newer versions, such as mops with cloth strips or microfiber pads, and electrostatic sweepers, do their jobs better—and with less mess.

DO YOU KNOW?

America's first vacuum cleaner was invented in 1865. Until electric vacuums took over in the 'teens, most models were powered by hand pumps, and some required the efforts of two people: one to pump, the other to sweep.

WINDOW UPKEEP

Try Martha's tips to ready your windows for spring.

Start With Storms

Remove storm windows. Make sure they're labeled with room and window location so you know where to replace them in the fall. Clean them, replace cracked panes, recaulk edges, and repaint frames before storing.

Screens Come Next

Take screens out of storage. Clean them, and inspect them for holes. If you find any, realign the wires using tweezers, patch the holes with another piece of screen, or replace the whole screen if necessary. Put screens up.

Time It Right

Choose a mild, cloudy day to do your window washing. Bright sun and strong heat can dry the cleaning solution, causing hard-to-remove streaks.

Prep the Site

Since they will need cleaning themselves and would get in the way, remove window coverings, such as curtains or blinds. Use a soft brush or the vacuum cleaner to remove dust and cobwebs from windowsills and frames.

Get Going

Gather your supplies; keep them all in a bucket so everything's ready when you are. You can use a commercial window cleaner or a homemade mix; try 1/4 cup white vinegar to 2 cups water. Paper towels and lintless cloths—such as tightly woven cotton, not terry cloth—both work well to remove the solution. (Some people swear by using newspaper, which is indeed effective, but wet newsprint can rub off onto sills and walls.) You'll also need rubber gloves and a sturdy ladder for high spots. Spray the cleaner onto the cloth to prevent puddling, then wipe the window from top to bottom.

Or Try...

Using a mild, soapy solution and a squeegee, a technique that works particularly well on really dirty windows. Dip a sponge into a bucket of soapy water made by mixing a few drops of mild dish soap and warm water, wring it lightly, and wipe down the windowpane. Moisten your squeegee blade—if it's dry, it will skip—and draw it down the pane from top to bottom; continue, overlapping strokes (for large windows, "snake" the squeegee back and forth across the window). After each stroke, wipe the blade, and finish by drying the sill.



CARING FOR HOUSEHOLD FABRICS

It can be difficult to determine the right technique to use when cleaning household fabrics. Store-bought curtains and slipcovers usually come with care tags, but custom ones don't. And in the case of upholstery, the tags supply only coded messages to professional cleaners about which chemicals to use.

The best routine care for household fabrics is vacuuming them with the upholstery attachment to remove grit, which can grind into fabric and damage its fibers over time. In the event of a spill, blot liquids immediately with clean white towels. For deep cleaning, the proper method depends largely on the type of fabric. Consult our chart below.

FABRIC	DEEP CLEANING
 <p>PLAIN-WEAVE LINEN AND COTTON CANVAS, CHINTZ, DENIM, GINGHAM, SAILCLOTH, SATEEN, TICKING, TOILE</p>	<p>Curtains, slipcovers, and other removable items are cold-water machine-washable, so long as they are preshrunk and colorfast (test by rubbing a wet white washcloth gently on a discreet area, such as a hidden seam, to see if any color comes off. For major cleaning, hire a professional. Glazed fabrics, such as chintz, should never be ironed because heat damages the shiny finish.</p>
 <p>SILK (CREPE, TAFFETA) AND SATIN</p>	<p>These should be dry-cleaned. Satin, which can be woven from pure silk, rayon, acetate, or polyester, has a lustrous face and a dull underside; iron only the dull side. (Harsh sunlight is the enemy of silk, so if used for draperies, it should be lined with a cotton backing; position silk-upholstered furniture out of direct sunlight, or protect it with cotton slipcovers.)</p>
 <p>RAYON</p>	<p>Although rayon itself is washable, it is often sized with coatings that are water soluble; professional cleaning is best unless a care tag directs otherwise.</p>
 <p>JACQUARDS BROCADE, DAMASK, MATELASSÉ, TAPESTRY</p>	<p>Any such pattern, which is created by the weave, requires mild washing. For cotton and linen, use the gentle cycle on the washing machine. If the fabric contains silk, dry-clean only. Before laundering, mend, clip, or point out any loose threads to a professional cleaner.</p>
 <p>PILE FABRICS CHENILLE, CORDUROY, VELVET, VELVETEEN</p>	<p>If made of preshrunk cotton, these can be washed with water and detergent (test for colorfastness as with plain weaves). Avoid snags, which can destroy construction. Pile fabrics made of acetate, polyester, or rayon should be professionally cleaned. In either case, do not iron, because piles flatten easily from moisture and pressure.</p>
 <p>WOOL</p>	<p>Dry-clean only. When vacuuming, be careful not to rub vigorously since wool is very difficult to repair or patch once it is torn.</p>

The diluted dishwashing-soap solution called for below is made with 1 tablespoon of fragrance- and dye-free liquid soap (containing sodium laurel sulfate, or sodium laureth sulfate) and 9.5 ounces of water. Pour it into a tiny spray bottle. Do not use the enzyme detergent, called for below, on protein fibers, such as silk, wool, cashmere, or angora. Always wash fabric after using a dry solvent (such as mineral spirits or acetone), and do not use acetone on acetate.

STAIN-REMOVAL BASICS	
NOTE: This chart is for washable items only.	
STAIN	TREATMENT
GREASE (butter, oil, mayonnaise)	Treat area with a dry solvent (such as mineral spirits or acetone) in a well-ventilated room. Using an eyedropper, rinse with isopropyl alcohol; dry well. Spray diluted dishwashing-soap solution on any remaining residue, and soak the item in an enzyme detergent before washing.
PROTEIN (blood, egg)	Spray diluted dishwashing-soap solution on stain, and let it sit; rinse in tepid water. If stain remains, treat area with an enzyme detergent, and wash according to label instructions.
FRUIT OR VEGETABLE (juice, jam)	Spray diluted dishwashing-soap solution on the stain to remove sugars. Using an eyedropper, flush the area with white vinegar and then hydrogen peroxide to remove any remaining color. Follow up with an enzyme detergent to remove residue before washing.
GRASS	Treat area with a dry solvent in a well-ventilated room. Press with cheesecloth; tamp with a soft-bristled brush. Repeat to remove as much pigment as possible. Flush area with isopropyl alcohol, tamp, and let dry. Follow up with an enzyme detergent to remove residue before washing.
RED WINE	Spray diluted dishwashing-soap solution on stain; tamp with a soft-bristled brush. Flush with water, apply white vinegar, and tamp; let stand several minutes; flush again. If stain remains, apply hydrogen peroxide, and let stand. If stain persists, apply 1 or 2 drops of ammonia to wet area. Flush with water. Treat with an enzyme detergent; wash. If stain is still there, apply a powdered nonchlorinated color-safe bleach, such as sodium percarbonate; rewash.
WHITE WINE	Flush the stain with cold water, and spray with diluted dishwashing-soap solution. Treat area with an enzyme detergent, and then wash.
COFFEE OR TEA	Using an eyedropper, flush area with lemon juice or white vinegar to remove stain; then treat with a stronger bleach, if necessary. To help remove sugar or milk, spray area with diluted dishwashing-soap solution, then wash with an enzyme detergent.
CHOCOLATE	Gently scrape off excess chocolate; spray area with diluted dishwashing-soap solution. Follow up with an enzyme detergent to remove residue before washing.
LIPSTICK	Use a dull-edged knife to remove excess lipstick. Using an eyedropper, apply a dry solvent (such as mineral spirits or acetone) in a well-ventilated room; tamp with a soft-bristled brush. Flush area with isopropyl alcohol, and tamp. Repeat until all stain is removed, and let dry. Spray with diluted dishwashing-soap solution. Treat with an enzyme detergent, and wash.
WAX OR GUM	Use ice to freeze wax or gum, or place item in the freezer; scrape or crack off as much as you can, then remove residue with an oil solvent or mineral spirits. Rinse with isopropyl alcohol; let dry. Treat with an enzyme detergent; wash.
MUSTARD	Using an eyedropper, flush stain with vinegar; then wash with diluted dishwashing-soap solution.
SAUCES (tomato, ketchup, barbecue)	Scrape off sauce; spray area with diluted dishwashing-soap solution. Soak in tepid water. If color remains, apply white vinegar with an eyedropper. Treat with an enzyme detergent; wash. If color persists, apply several drops of hydrogen peroxide; let sit. Rinse; treat again with enzyme detergent, and wash.
SOY SAUCE	Spray with diluted dishwashing-soap solution; tamp with a soft-bristled brush. Flush with water, apply white vinegar, and tamp; let stand several minutes, and flush again. If stain remains, apply hydrogen peroxide, and let stand. If stain persists, apply 1 or 2 drops of ammonia to wet area. Flush with water. Treat with an enzyme detergent; wash. If stain is still there, apply a powdered nonchlorinated color-safe bleach, such as sodium percarbonate; rewash.
VINAIGRETTE	First, treat stain as a grease stain (see grease, above). Then flush with white vinegar to remove any remaining spot. Follow up with an enzyme detergent to remove residue before washing.
FELT-TIP INK	First, build a "dam" around stain with mineral oil or petroleum jelly. Always work within the confines of the dam. Test the ink with a cotton swab saturated with water and another one saturated with isopropyl alcohol to determine whether the ink is oil-based or water-based. Whichever solvent pulls more pigment out of the stain is the one that should be used. If isopropyl alcohol is more effective, follow the steps for ballpoint ink stains below. If water is more effective, spray the stain with diluted dishwashing-soap solution, and then flush with cold water.
BALLPOINT INK	Build a "dam" around the stain with mineral oil or petroleum jelly. Always work within the confines of the dam. Treat area with isopropyl alcohol using an eyedropper. Remove any remaining pigment with a dry solvent in a well-ventilated room; let dry. Rinse with diluted dishwashing-soap solution, then wash with an enzyme detergent in warm water.
MUD	If stain is a combination of mud and grass, treat grass stain first (see grass, above). Shake or scrape off residue; pretreat stain with diluted dishwashing-soap solution, and soak. Then treat with an enzyme detergent; wash.

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CLEANING APPLIANCES

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If you wipe appliances regularly with a damp cloth or sponge, most will require little additional maintenance. A buildup of grime, however, calls for a bit more elbow grease and sometimes even a particular cleaning solution. Before you get to work, be sure to consult the owner's manual or call the company's customer-service line, since manufacturers use a variety of materials to make their appliances.

REFRIGERATOR

A frost-free refrigerator dehydrates its interior, turning liquid spills into caked-on lumps. Soak removable parts in warm, slightly soapy water or a solution of 1 or 2 tablespoons baking soda for every quart warm water. Loosen a hardened spill on fixed parts by covering it with a damp sponge or cloth; use a toothbrush in crevices. Don't use bleach or ammonia, which can damage some surfaces.

Odors: Plastic linings absorb odors. Before tackling them, move food to a cooler or into paper bags wrapped in an old quilt or blanket for insulation. Unplug the refrigerator, wash the interior with the baking-soda solution, and wipe it dry. When the refrigerator is on again, slide a shallow pan of activated charcoal (available at plant nurseries and pet stores) onto a shelf. If odors return, recharge the charcoal in a 300° oven for an hour.

If the bad smell isn't gone in two weeks, place a small dish of vanilla extract in the refrigerator to mask it. Don't use odor-control products with a lemon scent because the fragrance sinks into plastic and stays there. To avoid unpleasant odors in the future, store leftovers in covered containers or resealable plastic bags, and wipe up spills promptly. An open box of baking soda inside the refrigerator will trap smells; when you notice the odor, replace the box with a fresh one.

Coils: Refrigerators cool by stripping heat from the air inside the compartment and releasing it through condenser coils. Dust acts like insulation on the coils and keeps them from releasing heat efficiently. Clean the coils with a vacuum wand or a long-handled brush. Older refrigerators may have coils located in the back. To avoid damaging your floor, try to clean them without moving the appliance. In newer ones, the coils are usually at the bottom, accessible by removing the front grill. Although some models have coils that their manufacturers say never need cleaning, pet dander can disprove that claim. Check coils periodically if you have cats or dogs.

FREEZER

See the refrigerator entry above for cleaning and odor control.

Drain hole: In side-by-side refrigerator-freezers, ice can build up on the bottom and block the defrost drain tube. If you can see the drain hole, mix 1 teaspoon baking soda in 2 cups hot water, put it in a turkey baster, and squirt it into the hole. If this doesn't work or if you can't find the drain hole (in some models, it's inaccessible), arrange for a service visit.

Manual defrost: With chest freezers and old refrigerator-freezers, never try to pry off ice with a spatula or other tool; it might puncture the lining. Instead, turn off or unplug the appliance, and store food as suggested above for cleaning a refrigerator. Melt ice with a fan or a hair dryer set on low.

CLEANING APPLIANCES

OVEN

When an oven starts smoking, it's time for a heavy-duty cleaning. Wash racks by hand unless the owner's manual says they're dishwasher-safe. Then try this homemade cleanser from "Clean House, Clean Planet," by Karen Logan (Pocket Books; 1997). Use aluminum foil to plug holes leading to the broiler. (Be sure to remove the foil after cleaning.) Mix 1/4 cup salt, 3/4 cup baking soda, and 1/4 cup water into a paste. Brush on, avoiding bare parts—salt corrodes metal. Let it sit overnight; remove mixture using a slotless spatula or a putty knife. Wipe with paper towels. Use a plastic scrubber or sponge to remove remaining spots.

MICROWAVE OVEN

Stains and odors are the biggest problems with microwaves.

Plastic interiors: Wipe stains with warm, soapy water, then plain water. If that isn't enough, clean with 1 or 2 tablespoons baking soda mixed into 1 quart water. For caked-on residue, heat water in the microwave on high for 3 minutes; let stand 5 minutes (keep the door closed), and then wipe interior. In the future, cover food with a paper towel before cooking or reheating.

To remove odors, clean with the baking-soda solution, wipe surfaces dry, and leave the door open for a few hours. If the smell persists, stir 6 tablespoons baking soda or 1/2 cup lemon juice into 1 cup water. In a microwave-safe dish, heat mixture on high for 2 to 3 minutes. Then leave the door open for a few hours.

Stainless-steel interiors: Use a plastic scrubber and a gentle abrasive. If that does not work (and you don't mind scratching the surface), try soap-filled steel wool.

Other parts: Clean doors with only warm, soapy water or a mild, nonabrasive cleaner, and a sponge or soft cloth. Wipe control panels with a barely damp (not wet) cloth; moisture behind the panel could ruin the oven.

STOVE

Electric burners: Wipe food off burners when they are cold. If residue remains, open windows or switch on an exhaust fan, turn burners to high, and let the food smoke off. If plastic melts onto a burner, scrape it off with a wooden spoon while coils are warm.

Gas burners: You can wash porcelain-coated stovetop pans and grates by hand unless their manufacturer recommends putting them in a dishwasher. Dishwasher detergent is more alkaline than hand-dishwashing liquid, and the machines keep their contents damp longer. Both factors may cause rust at gaps in chrome or porcelain coatings. You may not see the gaps, but the dishwasher will find them. Uncoated metal parts are best soaked and then rubbed with a scouring pad.

Glass cooktops: These must be protected from scratching. Clean with a pad safe for nonstick coatings, and dedicate it to only this use. Wipe up sugary spills while they are still warm. For burned-on food, use a razor blade fitted into a plastic handle: Hold it at an angle of about thirty degrees, and carefully scrape with the full width of the blade, not just a corner. Follow up with a dab of commercial cooktop cleaner on a dry paper towel, then wipe off the cleaner with another dry towel. If pans with copper or aluminum bottoms discolor your cooktop (and they might), switch to pans made of another material and use a cooktop cleaner recommended by the manufacturer; with daily application of the cleaner, stains should gradually disappear.