



Go **GREEN**

When You Spring Clean

By
Kate E. Stephenson

Tips on eco-friendly cleaning strategies – and a list of local businesses that can provide all the tools you need to spruce up your home this season >>>

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Spring is a time of renewal. It's a time to wipe the slate clean and lean into the hope of a fresh new start. This season, approach this process not as a never-ending list of onerous chores, but as a breakthrough moment to start the year off healthy and with positive purpose.

Green is a color that defines the season. It can also help you in your approach to spring cleaning. The tenets of green living — reduce, recycle, reuse — can help you wipe away the leftover grime of winter. Emerge from hibernation by using these eco-friendly tips that will help your home shine, inside and out.

Mind over matter. Spring cleaning can feel like a massive undertaking. Breaking it into manageable pieces will help you not only figure out what exactly needs to be done, but also reassure you that it is totally doable.

Do a quick inventory. Go from room to room, space to space, indoors and out. Note what needs to be cleaned, repaired, or removed. After you know what needs doing, arrange those activities by importance. Create a checklist. (Yes, a checklist. If you're like me, the very thought of a list might make you cringe. But it will help. If you've never used a checklist, this just might change your life.)

Get the green light. In order to go forward with your plan, you need to have the right tools. These 10 essentials for inside cleaning are handy household items that are usually found lying in a closet or cabinet: broom, mop, cotton rags/cloths, bucket, water, biodegradable dish detergent, baking soda, vinegar, and garbage bags. With these items, you can tackle just about any spring cleaning mess.

Special tasks, however, may call for special tools. For fixing damaged but savable treasures, make sure you have a fully stocked tool kit handy. Basics include Phillips head and flat head screw drivers, hammer, wrench, measuring tape, utility knife, and pliers. These simple tools will get you through most of basic repairs and simple upgrades throughout the year.

For outside cleaning, test your water spigot and hose to make sure that no damage was done over the frozen winter. There is nothing worse than turning on that hose

full force and having water shoot out in every direction. There are so many great new hoses that it's almost a boon if your hose has rotted. From self-coiling models and collapsible hoses that shrink to a tenth of their size for easy storing, to new nozzle attachments that easily and quickly adjust water pressure, you just might want to replace your hose on principle.

Whatever the task, figure out what you need to complete it and make those necessities available in the area in which you'll be working. Help yourself now, so you aren't frustrated later.

Reduce. Many people start this time-honored tradition by washing the windows. That is a fine practice, but if you start there you might end up doing double work. When you get to dusting, those beautiful clean windows will be filmy again in a flash. Reduce the need for double work by starting at the uppermost corners of your walls, clearing out those cobwebs and months of accumulated dust. Wipe from the ceiling down. This is a great way to ease into the business of cleaning. It gives you immediate results. You can see and feel the dirt moving off your surfaces and out the windows.

Recycle. While dusting you may find items — both treasures and trash — all around your home. If you stumble across treasure, find a better spot to display it. And upon discovering unnecessary items — also known as clutter — it's time to break out one of those essential garbage bags. Try using two different color bags to separate salvageable items that can be donated from items that have outlived their usefulness to anyone. Do some research on local donation centers, as many charities will pick up directly from your house, making donating a no-fuss snap.

Reuse. Traditional cleaning agents are effective, but can sometimes irritate the eyes, throat, and nose with lingering smells. Fortunately, there are common household items that are safe, green alternatives. When you're ready to break out the elbow grease, grab these three essentials: biodegradable dish detergent, white vinegar and baking soda. These simple products pack a cleansing wallop that's hard to beat. With almost infinite use, they have none of the toxic side effects of other products.

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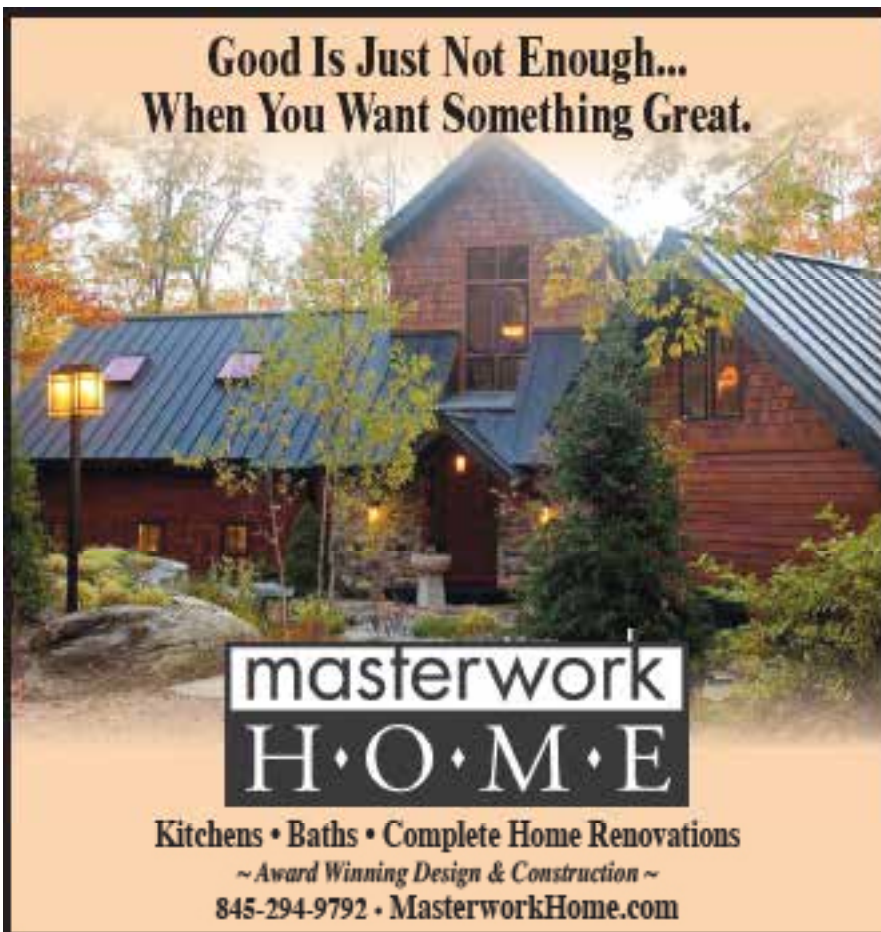
- Clean all floors. Add one cup of white vinegar and one to two squirts of dish detergent to every gallon of water to clean floors sparkling clean. Can be used in refillable spray mops.
- Remove lime scale and mineral deposits from showerheads, tea kettles, pots and pans. Use a solution of 50 percent white vinegar and 50 percent water and soak overnight.
- Refresh your coffeemaker. Fill water reservoir as usual and add one cup of vinegar. Run a brew cycle with no coffee grinds in the filter. Then run another brew cycle with just water (again with no coffee in the filter). Then brew as usual. Taste the difference in your next cup of coffee. Do this at least once a month to extend the life of your coffeemaker.
- Remove nasty film from glass. Whether windows, stemware, baby bottles, mason jars, or vases, use full strength vinegar to banish stubborn film, cloudiness, and spots.

Baking soda can:

- Remove smells from rooms, refrigerators, closets, cabinets, and more. Use a whole box of baking soda with holes cut out of the top to allow smells to permeate the box. Or, if you feel particularly crafty, make homemade air fresheners. Place one cup baking soda (and essential oil, if desired: grapefruit, lemon, orange, and peppermint work well) into a mason jar, cover with breathable fabric, and secure with a metal ring.
- Clean silver. Using three parts baking soda to one part water, create a paste. Rub onto silver (may need to use a little elbow grease), then rinse with warm water and dry with a soft cloth.
- Clean up grease spills. Again, create a paste using three parts baking soda to one part water. Rub paste on grease spot in a circular scrubbing motion.

Vinegar and baking soda combined can:

- Clean and deodorize a drain and garbage disposal. Pour one cup of baking soda down the drain, then one cup of white vinegar. Let sit for five minutes (you'll hear a bubbling sound), then run hot water down the drain.
- Remove burned food from the bottom of pots. Burned food can be stubborn and difficult to remove, but again sprinkle



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