

SPRING CLEANING

As spring rounds the corner, many of us prepare for that annual ritual called spring cleaning. It may not be something you look forward to with excitement, but the sense of renewal that comes from cleaning up after a long winter is worth the effort.

For most of us, however, it's determining where to start our spring cleaning that causes the most stress. Therefore, a good plan to tackle the many chores involved is the best place to start.

You may want to begin in the basement -- which for most homeowners, becomes the main storage area over the winter. While you're sorting through this year's accumulation of stuff, take a good look around at the walls and floors for any signs of winter damage like cracks or heaving -- or any evidence of water seepage.

If you do see anything, make a note of it and plan to get it fixed before it can develop into a major problem later on.

Declutter

Sort through old junk and throw out what you don't need. If you store Christmas decorations and wrapping paper in the basement, make sure these items are well away from any sources of heat - like the furnace.

Rotate other seasonal items so that you'll have easy access to any garden tools, lawn furniture or other items that you store in the basement.

Now is the time to clean or repair your lawn furniture -- not when that first warm spring day arrives. Most plastic lawn furniture can be cleaned easily with soap and water, but make sure you follow the manufacturer's directions.

Storage ideas

If you store winter items in your basement, garage or mudroom, it's a good idea to invest in some ready-to-assemble steel frame or wooden shelving units to store things like ski boots, skates and so on. These can be purchased relatively inexpensively from most hardware or building supply stores.

It's also good to free up as much floor space as possible by utilizing things like shelving units or overhead slots. Purchase some inexpensive plastic storage boxes to store sweaters, mittens, scarves and other winter items until next year.

Main Living Areas

Spring cleaning indoors usually involves cleaning the inside of all your windows and removing any plastic you may have installed to stop drafts. Remove any blinds or sheers and give them a good washing too. This will allow the beautiful spring sunshine to pour in.

When spring cleaning the main living areas of your home, try to develop a ruthless attitude about what can stay and what must go. If you don't really need a particular item, consider donating it to a local charitable organization.

Things like furniture, old clothing, appliances and other household items such as sheets, lamps and blankets can be repaired and reused. Items like magazines can also be recycled, along with home renovation materials.

Depending on how much clothes closet space you have, you may want to move your winter wardrobe to a storage closet and replace it with your spring/summer items.

Outdoors

Once you've tackled spring cleaning on the inside of your home, it's time to move to the outdoors. Take a critical look around your property for signs of damage and wear and tear. Clean up winter debris and trim any damaged tree limbs.

Check your driveway and sidewalks for signs of winter decay and look at the walls of your house for signs of loose siding or damaged bricks or eavestroughs. Pieces of shingle in your driveway may be a sign you need to tend to your roof. If you see any damage, plan to get it fixed before too long.

If you have a storage shed, it's a good time to start sorting through it. Move the winter tools, like snow shovels, snow blowers and other items to the back, and bring all your spring and summer things to the front for easy access.

Next, remove any storm windows, clean all window exteriors and repair any screens or other damage.

Finally, check foundations, chimneys and other nooks and crannies for bird and insect nests. Be on the lookout for termite tunnels on foundation walls and other signs of termite activity such as accumulations of translucent half-inch wings near foundation walls. If you do see signs of these unwanted critters, it's best to call in a professional exterminator.

Cleaning up outdoors will also require a good raking up of old leaves and other debris left over from the winter. You may need to do some pruning especially if any trees and shrubs were damaged over the winter. Be sure all risk of frost is past before removing the leaves you placed as mulch in your garden last fall and then check your local garbage collection schedule for garden waste pick up or add it to your composter.

Although it may seem overwhelming, making a spring cleaning plan and seeing it through to completion will give you a great sense of accomplishment and actually give you more time to enjoy the season.

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