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# Spring cleaning pointers

Spring is a season of renewal. When the flowers are blooming and the trees are budding and the weather is pleasantly warm, people often feel inspired to make changes around their homes. Work may begin with culling belongings and organizing essentials.

There is debate regarding where the practice of “spring cleaning” originated. Some researchers link it to certain religious groups. It has long been an ancient Jewish custom to thoroughly clean a house in preparation for the springtime feast of Passover. The house is scoured to remove any yeast bread, or chametz, from the home. Similarly, members of the Greek Orthodox church celebrate “Clean Week,” which is a week of cleaning before Lent. In Iranian culture, families spend days cleaning prior to the Persian New Year, which begins on the spring equinox.

Spring cleaning also has some secular roots. For instance, in the 1800s, Londoners routinely cleared their homes of grime and soot that accumulated over the winter.



Spring cleaning is still a ritual for many today. As people embark on their plans to tidy up, these tips can help them along.

**Tackle one big task a day**

Who hasn't started one project only to be distracted into moving along to another room? This often occurs when people discover something out of place in one space and then move that

item where it belongs, only to find a new cleaning task at hand in that space. Inefficiency can make you give up on spring cleaning prematurely. Agree to address one room/task a day. Keep a basket or box handy to store errant items until you move on to the next room.

**Stock up on supplies**

Prepare all of the cleaning supplies in advance. Put to-

gether a tool kit of sorts with the equipment you need, including mops, brooms, rags, cleansers, and the like. Organization can keep you on course.

**Harness your strengths and weaknesses**

Some people clean because they are stressed or angry, others do so to avoid other tasks. Keep personality in mind when establishing a

cleaning schedule. For example, clean at night if you're a night owl, or wait until you are feeling antsy before embarking on a “calm down cleaning.”

**Tackle seasonal chores first**

Some tasks need to get done to prepare for the spring and summer season. These may include cleaning the grill and sorting through outdoor furniture and decor. Spring cleaning may involve readying the pool for another year of use, or cleaning out rain gutters to prepare for spring storms. Tackle time-dependent tasks first and then move on to others that are less time-sensitive.

**Spread out the work**

Some people like to devote full weekends to spring cleaning, but that can be overwhelming for others. Breaking down cleaning tasks into 15- to 30-minute intervals each day can make the job more tolerable.

Spring cleaning season has arrived, and certain tips can make the job more efficient and manageable.



**Mediterranean flavors shine through in salad**

People often turn to lighter fare when the weather warms because a dense, hot meal can contribute to feeling sluggish or overheated when the mercury has risen. In addition to sandwiches and platters of finger foods, salads can be refreshing on warm days. They also tend to be less calorie-dense and healthier than other offerings.

This recipe for “Mediterranean Salad,” courtesy of The American Heart Association, is full of vegetables and beans and fits with a heart-friendly diet. It's filling and delicious any time of the day or year.

**Mediterranean Salad**  
Serves 4

- 1 medium head lettuce (green leaf, red leaf or romaine), cut into thin strips
- 1 medium cucumber, chopped
- 1/2 cup tomatoes, chopped
- 1 15.5-ounce can no-salt-added chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 medium red onion, finely sliced
- 1/2 cup crumbled fat-free or low-fat feta cheese, or 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar or 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper

In a large bowl, gently toss the lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, chickpeas, onion, and feta.

In a small bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, garlic powder, and pepper.

Pour the dressing over the salad, tossing to combine.

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## Spring activities for families to enjoy together

Spring is one of the most popular seasons of the year. After several months of chilly temperatures in many regions, spring provides a welcome reprieve from the cold.

Moderate temperatures makes it much more comfortable and inviting to venture outdoors, particularly for families with children who might not adapt to the cold as well as adults. The following are some family-friendly activities that make the most of spring renewal.

### Visit botanic gardens

If there's a botanical garden nearby, a visit in spring is a great time to soak in the beauty of nature. That's because an abundance of flowers bloom during the spring, meaning a garden will be in peak form. Visitors can meander through rows of rose bushes or tour the labyrinth of trimmed hedges. Beautiful, flowering cherry trees, with their delicate pink or white petals, also are sights to behold in spring.

### Prepare a home garden

Visiting a garden is one thing, creating one at home is another. In addition to planning a vegetable garden to enjoy tasty pickings throughout summer, you can devote some property to flowers that will attract wildlife. Check with a garden center about which flowers and plants attract butterflies and other beneficial insects. Many garden centers sell butterfly and hummingbird mixes to attract wildlife.

### Go animal watching

Flowers are not the only thing on display come the spring. Many animals, including birds, are born this time of year. Baby animals are not only adorable, they can be entertaining to watch grow. Families can spend time viewing the animals that visit their yards or surrounding parks, being careful to



keep their distance. Adults or young, so it's better to watch from the lens of a camera or with binoculars. Always resist the urge to help a baby animal who seems like it was abandoned. The parent may be a short distance away gathering food or trying to avoid drawing attention to the young to deter predators.

### Get out on the water

A bright, warm day is an ideal time to enjoy the open water. Spring is a season when many marinas reopen and avid boaters put their vessels back into the water. You also can venture into streams or lakes aboard kay-

aks or canoes, getting exercise and seeing the scenery in the process. Bring a fishing pole along and cast it into the water for a few hours of recreation.

### Make wind chimes

Enhance the garden or decor around the home by making wind chimes or other percussion items that can create beautiful music when spring breezes blow. Commercially available kits are sold, but wind chimes also can be made from items like bamboo or even strung shells.

These are just a few family-friendly activities to enjoy this spring.

You also can venture into streams or lakes aboard kay-

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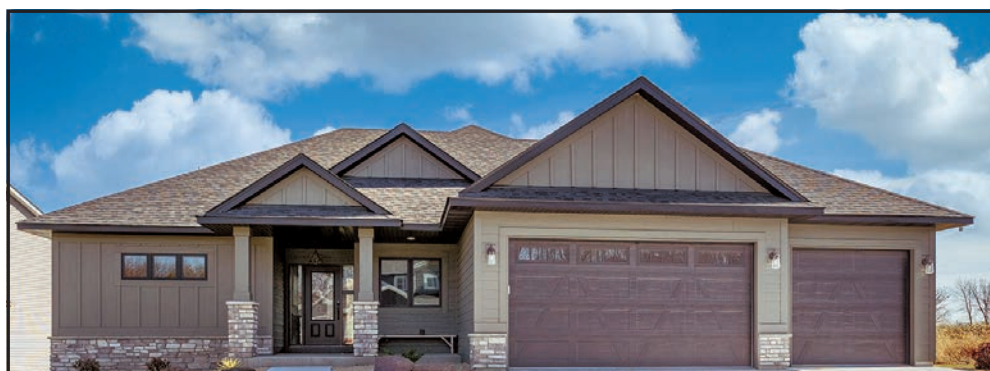
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# Budget-friendly ways to freshen up your home's exterior

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.

Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

• **Power washing:** Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Homeowners can rent power washers to do it themselves or hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.

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• **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book.



Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

• **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. Homeowners should take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy, so look for a sturdy box as well as one that has drainage holes.

• **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs, knockers, house numbers, and even the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home appears to residents and visitors.

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## Bite back against Lyme disease

Among the tall grasses and wildflowers that sprout each spring and summer lies a stealth predator just waiting for its chance at an easy meal. Ticks may be small in stature, but their impact on bite victims is potentially significant. Preventing Lyme disease and other tickborne illnesses comes down to following some key steps.

• **Learn how common Lyme disease is.** Lyme disease affects an estimated 476,000 people each year in the United States alone, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases. However, instances of Lyme disease are likely underreported due to undiagnosed cases.

• **Know which ticks carry Lyme disease.** The black-legged deer tick and the Western black-legged tick carry the Lyme disease spirochete. The black-legged tick is native to the northeastern, mid-Atlantic and north-central U.S., while the western black-legged tick is found on the Pacific coast.

• **Wear light-colored clothing outdoors.** When traveling in areas where ticks reside, it is important to wear light-colored clothing. Long pants and tall socks, long-sleeved shirts, and hats also should be worn. It is easier to spot ticks on light-colored clothing, and covering up prevents ticks from gaining easy access to skin.

• **Know where to expect ticks.** John's Hopkins Medicine says black-legged ticks live in moist and humid environments, particularly in and near wooded or grassy areas. Walking through leaves and bushes or through tall grasses can disturb ticks and enable them to jump onto people or pets. To avoid ticks, walk in the center of trails and avoid tall vegetation.

• **Be mindful of pets.** Even if you do not venture outdoors into tick-laden environments, your dog may. He or she can carry ticks into the house where they may end up on you or other family members. Prescription tick repellent products are available from veterinarians, and there are topical solutions and collars that can keep ticks away.

• **Remove ticks quickly and correctly.** The CDC says if a tick is removed in less than 24 hours from when it first attached, the chances of getting Lyme disease is very small. Remove a tick with fine-tipped tweezers as soon as it is noticed, being cautious to remove all mouth parts. Try not to squeeze the tick, as it can regurgitate saliva and other fluids when squeezed.

• **Repel ticks when possible.** Create less favorable conditions for ticks. Use a product containing DEET or permethrin on clothing to repel ticks. Some people use chemical-control agents on their properties to reduce the number of ticks in the yard. Discourage deer from the property, as they can carry many ticks, by erecting fences and removing vegetation that deer eat.

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# Common allergy triggers

The human body is a well-oiled machine that is a wonder of biological efficiency when working properly. The body's immune system is integral to keeping a person healthy, and it does that by recognizing foreign invaders, such as viruses and bacteria, and then launching an attack to eradicate them. Sometimes, however, the body treats outside substances as harmful when they're really just nuisances. This is the case with allergens.

Allergens, according to eMedicine Health, trigger an immune system response to various substances the body deems harmful. In turn, the body overreacts to these substances, triggering allergic reactions. Allergic reactions may occur in one person and not another. The immune system produces antibodies, which can cause certain effects, including inflammation of the skin, sinuses, digestive system, or airways, depending on the allergen, according to the Mayo Clinic.



Many things can trigger allergies, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 50 million people in the United States have allergies. Here's a look at some of the more common allergies that tend to rear their heads when weather warms up.

**Pollen**

The air is filled with pollen come the spring and summer. Freshly blooming grasses, trees, flowers, and even weeds produce an abundance of pollen this time of year. It may coat vehicles outside and make its way indoors when people throw open windows to enjoy warm breezes.

Pollen allergies are quite common and cause runny, stuffy nose, itchy eyes, sneezing, watery eyes, and itchiness of the skin or roof of the mouth in some instances. Decongestants tend to be recommended when pollen count is high. It's also best to leave windows closed during these times.

**Mold**

Mold are very small fungi with spores that float in the breeze like pollen. Mold thrives in damp areas. Mold may grow unchecked after spring rains or in piles of damp leaves. It also can be found in musty basements or bathrooms. Using a dehumidifier indoors can help alleviate mold, but outdoors it may be a little more challenging to control. When doing yard work in damp areas, wear a mask to avoid breathing in spores.

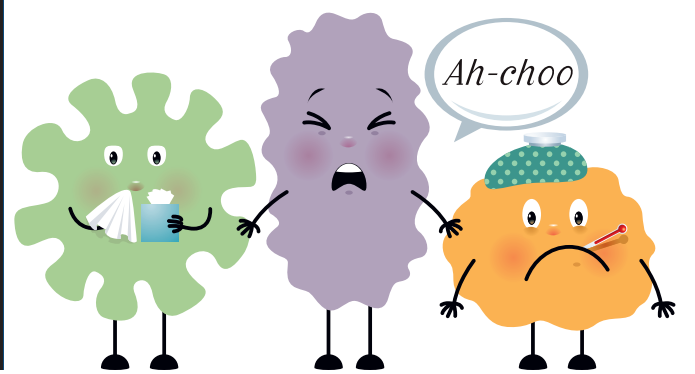
**Dust mites**

Chances are the arrival of spring may trigger the desire to do a little cleaning. In turn, it's highly likely that dust will be disturbed, and along with it, dust mites. WebMD says dust mites are microscopic and people may not even know they are around. Keeping a home free of dusty items can reduce dust mite numbers. Also, cover mattresses, pillows and wash sheets weekly in hot water to help alleviate dust mite infiltration.

**Insect stings**

We tend to think of allergens in terms of small substances that are inhaled, but insects that are abundant in the warm weather can be troublesome, too. An insect sting or bite can cause hives, itching, swelling, shortness of breath, or even anaphylaxis. While there's no definitive way to avoid all insects, people can opt against brightly colored clothes and scented lotions or cosmetics. Insect repellents and skipping sweet foods or beverages at outdoor meals also may help.

Allergens are common this time of year, and people can take caution to feel better if they suffer allergies.



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## Tips to pick the right plants for your landscape

Each year, gardening enthusiasts anxiously await the arrival of spring. Spring is a great season to plant new flowers, plants, grasses, and trees, making it a popular time of year to spend sunny days out in the yard.

Veteran gardeners may know their landscapes well and be able to pick the right plants on their own. Novices may need a little help as they look to give their landscapes a whole new look. The following are some helpful tips to help homeowners pick the right plants for their landscapes.



• **Conduct a site evaluation.** A colorful landscape featuring an array of plants and flowers can be eye-catching and add curb appeal to a property. However, where plants will be planted is a significant variable that must be considered before homeowners choose what to plant. Site evaluation is the first step when picking plants. A number of factors must be evaluated, including light availability; water availability; exposure to the elements, including wind and extreme temperatures; and competition from existing vegetation, among other things. Document these variables prior to picking plants. For example, take note of the area you plan to plant to see if it is full sun or partial shade, and then pick plants whose growing conditions align with those you observe.

• **Look at more than looks.** Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen for a space. If the wrong plants are chosen, they're unlikely to thrive or they could threaten existing vegetation, thus compromising the overall appeal of the property. Native plants can often handle local weather conditions, so prioritize natives over more exotic plants whose key attribute is aesthetic appeal. If jaw-dropping aesthetic appeal is your top priority, speak with a local landscaping professional about which natives can provide that without compromising surrounding vegetation.

• **Consider maintenance prior to planting.** Maintenance is another variable gardeners must consider. Newly planted trees may require substantial watering until they've fully established their roots, and some homeowners may not have time for that. In addition, certain plants may require a considerable amount of pruning in order to create and maintain the look homeowners desire. Individuals must be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain new plantings that require such diligence. If

not, look for plants that don't require much maintenance while keeping in mind that even low-maintenance plants still require some effort and attention.

• **Consider local wildlife.** If your lawn is routinely visited by local wildlife, then look for plants that won't look like a meal to these welcome, if uninvited, guests. For example, if you routinely see deer lounging around in your backyard, look for deer-resistant plants. This is a good way to protect your investment, of both time and money, and ensure minimal wildlife traffic through your newly landscaped yard.

Spring gardens are awe-inspiring, especially when homeowners embrace various strategies for successful planting.



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## Decor ideas to give homes a fresh look this spring

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and that spirit of renewal can take hold inside a home. Warm weather and longer hours of daylight make spring a perfect time to imagine a home's interior design in a new light. The following are a handful of decor ideas that may inspire homeowners to give their homes an entirely new look this spring.

- **Wallpaper:** Wallpaper fell out of favor years ago, but new styles that aren't so heavily patterned can make for wonderful additions to any room. Large-scale prints can give a room a whole new feel without giving homeowners or their guests the impression that they have stepped back in time. A simple, mural-style floral wallpaper on the walls surrounding a table in a breakfast nook can bring nature inside.

- **Pastel colors:** Nothing embodies the spring quite like pastel colors. If colorful, bright flowers dot the garden in the backyard, homeowners can bring those uplifting pastels inside by painting an accent wall or even adding some brightly colored accent furniture to rooms that could use a lift.

- **Declutter:** Clutter is often conquered during spring cleaning sessions, but homeowners who want to create more free-flowing interior spaces can downsize their furniture and/or look for multipurpose features that make it hard for clutter to take over a room. Create more open space in entertaining areas by mounting the television and getting rid of a bulky entertainment center. Create even more space by replacing rarely used end tables with a storage ottoman where books and magazines can be stored to give a room a fresh, clean look.

- **Accent features:** Sometimes the smallest changes to an interior space make the biggest impression. Replace dated accents like vases and table lamps with newer items that reflect the latest styles and trends. Such adjustments won't break the bank, and they can give rooms a whole new feel.

Spring is a great time to reconsider home interiors. This spring homeowners can embrace various strategies, both big and small, to give their homes a whole new feel.



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