

# Spring Home & Garden



**W**ith spring well on its way, it's time to say goodbye to all that is gray and dreary. Our focus now is on welcoming the fresh air and bright colors.

Spring is a time for new beginnings, and everything is in bloom. Why not have your home follow suit? Here are a just a few inexpensive ways to freshen up your home decor for the new year.

### **THINK LIGHTER**

Say so long to heavy drapes and thick throws. You can do a lot to brighten up a room by changing out your linens.

Introduce throw pillows in pastel colors and exchange the chenille for a soft cotton throw. Open up those heavy drapes, give them a good dusting and allow the sunshine to warm the room.

The lighter and brighter a room becomes, the more like spring it will feel.

### **BRING IN FRESH FLOWERS**

Whether you pick up a fresh bouquet at the supermarket or potted ferns are more your style, there is nothing like adding a little greenery to liven up a room.

Bringing a little piece of nature indoors will help connect the inside of your home to all that is blooming outside.

### **CHANGE UP YOUR ART**

The most important feature when it comes to choosing art is sticking with what makes you happy. Choose pieces that give you joy while giving your space a whole new look.

Even changing out your photos for newer ones or snapshots from vacation can update your space in a hurry.

### **DECLUTTER**

Winter brings with it an influx of decor for the holiday season. While that extra cheer is welcomed in the colder months, that same decor can begin to feel oppressive once the seasons begin to change.

Spring is the time to take inventory of your things — store holiday decor, go through the stacks of magazines and put away items from other areas of the house that have migrated into your main living space. Make everything new.



# Spring Cleaning Checklist

Once spring weather hits, most people get the itch to dust out the corners and coffers for a truly fresh start to the New Year.

But many homeowners focus their attention on the inside of their houses and ignore important maintenance on the outside. Consider the following updates to give your home a spring overhaul.

## WINDOWS AND DOORS

Windows and doors are the most common places for leaks, which can allow hot summer air in and cooled air out. As you clean, look for cracks in the caulking and weather stripping. If you notice any fogging up of glass in windows or doors over the winter, this could be a sign that the weather seal has been compromised.

## AIR CONDITIONER MAINTENANCE

Just as you (hopefully) serviced your furnace in the fall, it is important to give your air conditioner the once over before you need it.

This includes replacing the filter and checking hose connections. Performing this chore in the spring means you won't have any surprises come summer.



## EXTERIOR WALLS, ROOF AND ATTIC

Do a perimeter sweep of the exterior of your home once all the snow melts away and you're sure the last frost has come and gone. Look for damaged areas, especially near the gutters and foundation. Any openings are an

invitation for water and small critters such as carpenter ants and termites.

Additionally, it is important to check over your roof — especially after a rough or particularly wet winter. Make plans to have any cracked or missing shingles replaced by a roofer.

## THE GARAGE

This is one “room” that gets ignored when it comes to our spring-induced zest for organization. In fact, 86 percent of Americans can't even fit their cars in their garage for all the stuff they store in it. It is time to reclaim the garage.

Gather up recycling and

take it to your local center. Organize the items you've been saving for the garage sale you still haven't hosted and donate them. Grab a broom and give the garage floor a good sweep.

No matter what level of clutter your garage houses, odds are it could use some TLC.



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# Spring Garden Planning

**T**his spring, plan your best garden ever — or maybe even your first garden ever.

The first step to achieving a well-organized garden is planning. Here's what you need to know.

## TALK WITH LOCAL EXPERTS

If this is your first time planning a garden, consult with a regional garden-planting guide. You can find one at most hardware stores or nurs-

eries.

If you are a seasoned pro, you probably are already familiar with the timing of your last frost, but you might find some new information by checking with your local professionals.

## SEEDS VS. SEEDLINGS

If you are just starting out, seedlings are a safer option. There is no need for you to

nurture seeds from infancy when you're trying to get a handle on your gardening strategy.

If you prefer to grow your own, start your seeds inside several weeks before your last frost date.

## CREATE A WORKSHEET

This is where you decide what you want to plant, how much of it you want to plant and which vegetables you want to plant next to one another.

Tomatoes, peppers, zucchini squash and lettuce are good vegetables for beginners. Don't forget to contact your local nursery to see what grows best in your area.

## BEGINNERS: CHOOSING A PLOT

Choose a location on your property that receives a lot of sun. Vegetables need at least six hours of direct sunlight each day to grow properly. You also need a space with good, loose soil.

If a large garden intimidates you, consider a raised bed. You choose the size and even create a separate area for each vegetable, only taking on what you want.

## SKIPPING THE VEGGIES

You also could skip planting vegetables altogether and stick with herbs. Not only are they great for seasonal cooking, but they also smell fantastic and each has a unique beauty to it. Plant in beds or in pots. The choice is yours.

# Dress Up Your Windows

**W**indows are major players in home design. How they are dressed and framed from the exterior lends to the curb appeal of your home. Keeping them clean and dressed with drapery inside will affect the overall mood of a room and how much natural light a room receives.

All of this is to say don't ignore your windows.

## ADDING OR REPAIRING SHUTTERS

Shutters add so much to the curb appeal of your home. Making sure yours are in good shape is a worthwhile investment.

Each year, inspect your shutters. Do they need a new coat of paint? Are they secured properly with no loose screws? If your home lacks shutters, consider adding them. There are few architectural styles that shutters work against, so be sure to consult with your local window and gutter installation company.

## DRESSING WINDOW BOXES

If you have window boxes, spring is the ideal time to clean them out and prep them for foliage. Swing by your local hardware store or nursery and choose annuals with lots of color to fill them.

If you do not currently have window boxes, consider adding them to the mix. Window boxes add texture and flare to the exterior of any home.

## INTRODUCING NEW DRAPERIES

If you recently replaced your drapes or love the ones you currently have, don't underestimate what a good cleaning will do for them.

Check the tags and see if yours are machine washable. If not, you may have to take your drapes to the dry cleaners. This trip will be well worth it when you see how much brighter they look rehung across your windows.

## A GOOD POWER WASH

After a winter full of dreary weather and high wind chills, your windows are not at their peak performance when it comes to light.

Give them a good scrub inside before heading outside to hit up their exterior panes. If your windows are double-hung, this will be a much easier task. Always follow safety instructions on cleaning equipment, especially when you're dealing with glass.



We tend to shut our homes up during the winter months and perform our own version of hibernating.

And while we enjoy the cozy feeling this hibernation provides, it also can induce poor circulation of air and accumulation of dust and germs. Washing and changing out your linens is a necessary stage of spring cleaning.

Go through every room thoroughly, and be sure to wash any winter items before storing. By the end, your home will be a brighter, cleaner version of itself.

### BEDROOMS

Say goodbye to all those heavy comforters, and welcome in light summer quilts. Changing out your bedding for lighter fabrics in an attractive print will go a long way toward freshening your bedroom.

Since spring can still be cool, keep a cozy but light throw at the foot of your bed. Not only does it make for an easy grab in the middle of the night, but will soften the look of your spring bedding.

### LIVING AREAS

Think throws, pillows and draperies. Not only is it good to change out these items for their lighter counterparts, but it also is smart to begin storing excess.

Spring requires fewer layers, so start putting away what you know you won't use. Give your draperies a good wash and inspect your blinds.

Keeping a space clean and bright is the trick to a quick



## Change of Season, Change of Linens

“freshen up.”

### KITCHEN TOWELS AND DOOR MATS

These often are forgotten items that can have a major impact on the freshness and

cleanliness of your home. Winter weather can be hard on door mats — both indoor and outdoor.

Replacing these with fresh mats will not only help keep the effects of spring showers

out of your house but gives you the opportunity to introduce a spring design.

And don't forget those kitchen towels. After all those holiday meals, they've most likely been more than pulling their

weight.

If you don't want to purchase new kitchen cloths, run your current ones through the wash with a good dose of bleach, and dry them with a few drops of your favorite essential oils.



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# Living the Cabana Life

When spring arrives, summer is just a hop, skip and jump away. There is nothing like relaxing by the pool on a hot summer's day.

Thinking ahead when it comes to your pool will ensure you are party-ready come warmer weather.

## PUTTING IN A POOL

Thinking of adding a pool to your backyard oasis? Here are few things to keep in mind as you plan.

- Know the basics of what you want before requesting quotes. Do you want an above- or below-ground pool? What general size are you looking to install?

- It's also important to be flexible on size if you aren't too constrained by your property. Allow yourself the imagination of going a little wider

or longer than you first considered.

- Understand the difference between vinyl, concrete and fiberglass. Not every material suits every need.

## REFRESHING YOUR EXISTING POOL

Diligence is required to maintain a clean, safe and attractive pool. By staying on top of pool maintenance, you will ward off major costs down the road.

Here are some key steps:

- Drain your pool cover and clean it before storing it for the season.

- Inspect your pool's tile or lining and look for cracks or potentials for leaks.

- Consider adding water to your pool. Proper water levels are important for your pool skimmer to run properly.

- Turn on all equipment to make sure everything is running properly. If there is a problem, you don't want to find out the weekend before a pool party.

## DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE TOYS

It is always a good idea to inspect your pool toys and floats before every season to be sure they are clean and safe.

Winter storage can produce mold or break down certain materials — weakening them and making them unsafe. Replace toys and floats that have been compromised and give toys that have survived the winter a good scrub before using them.

# Spring Energy-Saving Tips

**W**ith the start of a new season comes a fresh opportunity to find ways to save energy and money.

The following tips from the U.S. Department of Energy can help.

**1. Service your air conditioner.** Easy maintenance, such as routinely replacing or cleaning air filters, can lower your cooling system's energy consumption by up to 15 percent. Also, the first day of spring could serve as a reminder to check your air conditioner's evaporator coil, which should be cleaned annually to ensure the system is performing at optimal levels.

**2. Open windows.** Opening windows creates a cross-breeze, allowing you to naturally cool your home without switching on air conditioners. This is an ideal tactic in spring, when temperatures are mild.

**3. Use ceiling fans.** Cooling your home with ceiling fans will allow you to raise your thermostat four degrees. This can help lower your electricity bills without sacrificing overall comfort.

**4. Cook outside.** On warmer spring days, keep the heat out of your home by using an outdoor grill instead of indoor ovens.

**5. Install window treatments.** Energy-efficient window treatments or coverings, such as blinds, shades and films, can slash heat gain when temperatures rise. These devices not only improve the look of your home but also reduce energy costs.

**6. Caulk air leaks.** Using low-cost caulk to seal cracks and openings in your home to keep warm air out — and cash in your wallet.

**7. Bring in sunlight.** During daylight hours, switch off artificial lights and use windows and skylights to brighten your home.

**8. Set the thermostat.** On warm days, setting a programmable thermostat to a higher setting when you are not at home can help reduce your energy costs by approximately 10 percent.

**9. Seal ducts.** Air loss through ducts can lead to high electricity costs, accounting for nearly 30 percent of a cooling system's energy consumption. Sealing and insulating ducts can go a long way toward lowering your electricity bills.

**10. Switch on bathroom fans.** Bathroom fans suck out heat and humidity from your home, improving comfort.

