

A bright, airy dining room with a wooden table, tulips, and a window view. The room features a large window with a view of greenery, a wooden dining table with a rustic design, and a vase of pink tulips. The walls are white with framed pictures, and the floor is light-colored. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

SPRING
Home &
Garden

Spring Cleaning Checklist

Spring cleaning is a chance for a fresh start.

After a long winter spent cooped up at home, spring is a natural time to declutter, clean and organize your home. Here is a checklist of spring cleaning jobs to remember. You can go it alone, or consider hiring a local cleaning service to help you really make your home shine.

MarthaStewart.com recommends replenishing your cleaning supplies before you get started. That way you'll have all the tools you need for the job.

- **Basic cleaning.** Sweep, mop, vacuum, clean toilets, the works. This is the time to tackle deep-cleaning jobs you've been putting off. Sanitize the hard-to-reach area behind the toilet. Scrub off caked-on soap scum and grime on the bathroom faucet. Really get in there and finish the job.

- **Once-in-a-while jobs.** This is the time to clean the oven, open all the windows and clean the tracks, glass and screens. Degrease the kitchen cabinet doors and hinges. Give the refrigerator a deep clean, including the door seals and glass. Defrost the freezer, if needed. Deep clean the kitchen sink disposal. Polish any silver. Dust the blinds and wash or vacuum the curtains. Shampoo rugs. Clean washing machine seals. Dust and wipe down baseboards and crown



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molding. Clean and sanitize remote controls. Check or replace smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries. Replace air filters. Dust and clean light fixtures and ceiling fans. Vacuum refrigerator coils. Flip mattresses. Wash comforters and other large

bedding, or take them to the cleaners. Reseal grout. Polish or wax wooden furniture. Wax flooring.

- **Seasonal maintenance.** Clean gutters. Clean and repair outdoor furniture. Pressure wash the deck or patio. Clean any debris from

the roof. Consider having your air conditioning unit cleaned and serviced.

- **Declutter.** Spring is a great time to go through adults' and kids' closets to see which clothes no longer fit or have holes/stains. Make a donation pile and organize

the remaining clothes in drawers and closets. Do the same with toys and books. Toss any food that's been hanging around in the refrigerator a bit too long. Inventory the deep freeze so you can use up foods that have been lurking there.

Shopping for Solar

A solar array is installed in America every two minutes, according to community solar advocates Solstice.

With solar getting more affordable, more homeowners are jumping on board, having solar panels installed on their homes. Given the newness of solar energy, however, knowing what to look for while shopping for solar panels can be tricky.

The U.S. Department of Energy offers a primer for homeowners called “Homeowner’s Guide to Going Solar.” The website (bit.ly/3rIT1xk) covers the basics of how solar energy works, how to determine if your home is suitable for a solar installation, and the financial and safety considerations involved.

HOME SUITABILITY

Many factors are considered in determining whether your home is suitable for solar panels. In general, you will need to own your home and have a newer roof with a south-facing slope that isn’t obscured by excessive shade. Each individual solar company will have its own requirements.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

You can buy solar panels outright, finance them with a loan, or lease panels. With a loan or lease, your monthly payments could be lower than



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your monthly electricity bill, but you will be locked into a long-term contract. Another option is a power purchase agreement, through which a consumer agrees to purchase power produced by panels installed on his home at a set price. Purchasing panels could allow you to qualify for the Solar Investment Tax Credit, a 30% federal tax credit available through 2022. Lease and PPA agreements do not qualify for the credit.

Also ask about net metering.

This arrangement allows you to receive credit on your electric bill for power that your system feeds back into the grid.

Shop around with various solar installers and compare their financing options. Compare the up-front and monthly costs, as well as tax benefits.

SAFETY

If you’re worried about whether solar is safe for your home, rest assured the indus-

try is well regulated to protect homeowners. Solar panels must meet international inspection and testing standards, according to the Department of Energy, and installers must meet qualifications and install panels to meet local building, fire and electrical codes. Your system should be thoroughly inspected by a certified electrician before it goes online.

COMMUNITY SOLAR

If you decide solar panels

aren’t a good fit for your home or budget, you can still benefit from solar energy via community solar. This concept is a way for you to buy into a group solar project which feeds solar energy into the electricity grid, and get a credit on your electricity bill in exchange. To find a community solar project near you, visit communitysolar.energysage.com. Enter your average monthly electricity bill and ZIP code to see how much you could save per

Stay in the Know on Recalls

In December 2020, a U.S. ceiling fan manufacturer recalled nearly 200,000 fans due to a risk of the fan blades detaching during use, causing injury and property damage. It's important to keep tabs on recalled products that might be laying around your house with the potential to do harm.

You might think you have nothing to worry about, but in December 2020 alone, the CPSC issued recalls of dozens of household items, including the following: all-terrain vehicles, home energy storage batteries, gas camping stoves, portable baby sleepers, tents, flashlights, pole saws, bicycles, cell phone chargers, multi-cookers and more. The risks include burns, fire hazards, fall risks, suffocation and more.

To stay in the know, regularly visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission's recall website at www.cpsc.gov/Recalls. You can also sign up for e-mails about recalls in specific categories of products.

IN CASE OF RECALL

If you own a recalled prod-



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uct, the company that produced the product may offer repair, replacement or a refund. You may not need your receipt, so it's important to always look into rectifying the situation.

If you do receive a replacement product or refund, you will likely be required to destroy and dispose of the faulty product safely to keep it off the market.

SELL SMART

If you're planning a rummage sale or selling goods through the classifieds or an online marketplace, do your part to help keep dangerous products out of the marketplace by checking the CPSC website for recalls. Selling recalled products is illegal, not just for retailers but for individual sellers. If you find a product is recalled, immediately destroy

and dispose of it to help keep others safe. Many baby cribs with drop sides, as well as most cribs manufactured before June 2011, have been recalled and should not be resold. Check out the CPSC's publication "Resellers Guide to Selling Safer Products" at <https://bit.ly/3rFFdnj>.

SHOP SMART

To protect your family from

unsafe products before you buy, visit SaferProducts.gov, where reports of harm caused by products are cataloged in a searchable database.

On the website, you can search by brand and model number and read reports made by consumers about their experience with products from air purifiers to dishwashers to thermostats to lawn equipment and more.

Spring Pruning Basics

Many perennial plants need a spring pruning.

Their foliage may provide protection during the winter, but by spring, it's time to prune in order to encourage new growth. This means pruning is an essential part of your spring gardening plans.

Here are some pruning basics to get you started.

WHEN TO PRUNE

According to the Old Farmers Almanac, the timing of pruning a tree or shrub depends mostly on when it blooms and whether it blooms on old or new growth. In general, plants that flower after midsummer should be pruned in the spring, while those that bloom in winter, spring and early summer should be pruned soon after flowering.

Burger Farm and Garden Center reminds gardeners that while an ill-timed pruning may lead to fewer flowers and fruits, it is rarely fatal to the plant.

WHAT TO PRUNE

Fruit trees such as apple, cherry, peach and plum, and vines such as trumpet vine and wisteria, should be



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pruned in early spring. Spring-flowering shrubs such as lilacs and rhododendrons need to be pruned as soon as their early-spring blooms have faded. This will help ensure a good bloom next year. According to TheSpruce.com, Black-eyed Susan, gay-feather, purple coneflower and globe thistle seed heads are great food for birds, so leave them be until early spring, while coral bells, delphiniums, hostas, turtleheads and mums need the protection of their foliage during

winter. Don't cut them back until spring.

PRUNING TOOLS

It's important to keep your pruning tools sharp. While a plant can easily recover from a clean cut, a botched cut can weaken the plant and make the plant susceptible to disease. Sharpen shears and clippers, and oil moving parts to keep them working smoothly.

HOW TO PRUNE

Some plants need more

aggressive pruning than others. Consult the Old Farmers Almanac or your local extension service for particulars on how much to prune a particular shrub or plant.

In general, when pruning a tree, begin with removing any dead or dying branches, as well as any "suckers" — sprouts emerging from the base of the trunk. Make clean cuts flush to the branch, with no part of the growth remaining. Also remove "watersprouts," which are small, straight vertical shoots grow-

ing on the main branches.

Thin out the tree by removing branches that grow downward, toward the center of the tree or that cross paths with another branch, as well as any limbs along the trunk that are bigger in diameter than the trunk.

Then focus on evening out the branches and removing competing branches. Finally, prune the tree from the outermost growth to give it a pleasing shape, and promote the growth of shorter, thicker branches.

Protect your Siding Warranty

Your home's siding protects the structure of your home, but what protects your siding? The warranty.

Whether you're shopping for new siding or interested in maintaining the value of your current siding, it's important to understand how siding warranties work. That way you'll know what will be covered and what will not, and you can maintain your siding accordingly.

Labor or materials. Your siding manufacturer will likely provide a warranty on the siding itself. The installer might warranty the installation job, to be sure it's installed in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. Your installer should be able to explain the warranty options for both. In general, warranties that last longer or provide more protection will be more expensive. Consider how much the protection is worth to you. Would you have room in your budget to replace siding in a situation in which the materials and labor would not be covered? It might be worth spending a little more upfront to prevent major expenses later.

Coverage limits. What's covered by the warranty will also vary among manufacturer, product grade and material. A warranty may include protection from insects, hail, rot, delamination, excessive fading,



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peeling, cracking, rusting, corroding and more. Warranties will differ based on the material. Wood siding is much more susceptible to damage from things like water and insects, whereas composite siding is much more durable, with the ability to resist severe weather and repel insects.

Term. The term of the loan is another important consideration. Many manufacturers offer a limited lifetime warran-

ty. If the warranty covers only a set period, such as 50 years, check whether the warranty is pro-rated. This means that the older the siding is at the time of a claim, the less the manufacturer will pay. If you are remodeling a home to sell or intend to sell in the near future, consider whether the warranty can be transferred to new owners. This feature could increase the value of the home. Be sure to let the new owners

know how to take advantage of the transfer. There is usually a time limit in which the transfer must be completed, such as 30 or 45 days after the sale of the home. Some features of the warranty may not transfer, and the term may be reduced after the transfer.

Routine maintenance. The siding manufacturer will likely require that you keep the siding maintained to a certain standard. For example, you

may be required to use a soft-bristled brush as opposed to a pressure-washer. The manufacturer will offer recommended products to clean the siding and warn against using strong chemical cleaners. Damage caused by issues such as mold left on the surface of the siding may not be covered. The warranty may also prohibit you from painting, varnishing or otherwise refinishing your siding.

Plant Summer-Blooming Bulbs

Spring is the time to plant summer-blooming bulbs, such as dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, calladiums and elephant ears. Bulbs should be stored in a cool, dry place until all danger of frost has passed. Then it's time to plant.

WHEN TO PLANT

Exactly when you plant will depend on what planting zone you live in. According to GardenDesign.com, in colder climates such as USDA Zones 4 to 7, summer-flowering bulbs should be planted in mid to late spring (May to June), and in Zones 8 to 10, in early to mid-spring (late March to May).

HOW TO PLANT

The best resource for knowing how deep to plant your bulbs is the packaging they came in. In general, dig a hole that's 2-3 times as deep as the bulb is tall. The pointy side of the bulb should face up. The roots should face down. Give the bulbs a good watering. Continue watering whenever the soil is dry. Keep in mind that over-watering can cause the bulb to rot.

MIND YOUR SOIL

Most bulbs need rich soil, so mix some compost into your



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soil for the best results, especially if your soil is heavy clay or has poor drainage. Loamy or slightly sandy soil is ideal.

PREVENT WEEDS

The best way to prevent weeds is to add 2-3 inches of mulch on top of your flowerbeds. Bulbs can easily grow up

through the mulch. Weeds will have a harder time. Weed barrier fabric is not idea to use when planting bulbs, because it can prevent moisture from reaching the roots of the developing bulb. If you must use weed barrier fabric, cut slits in the fabric at the site of each bulb.

PLANT FOR VISUAL EFFECT

Consider when your flowers will bloom to provide blooms all season long. Different plants bloom at different times during the season. Others, such as such as seedum, day-lilies, hosta or bleeding heart, will bloom repeatedly until late

fall or provide consistent, rich foliage. Mix up your plantings so that your flowerbeds provide visual interest all season long.

Consult Longfield Gardens' Bloom Time Chart for Spring and Summer Bulbs at bit.ly/2KTQuQm to help you plan your flowerbeds.

Ideas for Repurposing a Shed

A backyard shed is handy for storing outdoor items, such as gardening tools, bicycles, lawnmowers and more. There's a trend, however, of repurposing backyard sheds into more usable living or storage spaces.

If your shed needs new life or you're looking for more space, consider these remodels. You can do a basic update on a budget, or go all out and turn the shed into a brand new space.

A STANDARD REMODEL

Update a gardening shed with a fresh coat of paint and new fixtures, such as a custom handmade potting bench complete with a wash basin, customized storage for gardening tools and gear and window boxes with flowers.

MAN CAVE OR SHE SHED

If you can afford to put more money into the project, why not turn the shed into a space all your own? Convert the shed to a man cave or she-shed. Add a TV, sofa and mini fridge for an entertaining space. Add custom storage and a craft table to make a crafting space.

Have a hobby? Wire the shed to run a pottery wheel, wood-working tools or more. Or



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make it a peaceful yoga space.

A GUEST HOUSE

If you could use a space for guests, consider converting the shed into a bull-blown guest house. You'll likely need to add insulation and heating/cooling, electricity and furniture to convert the space to a living area. You could also add a TV

and internet access. If your budget allows, you could even add plumbing.

A HOME OFFICE

The COVID-19 pandemic sent many people scrambling to find space in their homes for a home office. With internet access, soundproofing, insulation and HVAC, your shed

could become your new work-from-home space.

ADD A SHED

If you don't currently have a shed, consider adding one. You can buy pre-made sheds or build your own, or consider a prefab model that can be customized for the intended use. No matter what you do, check

into local ordinances regarding sheds. Sheds above a certain size may need to be permitted and inspected.

If you live in a neighborhood with a homeowner's association sheds may not be permitted or may need to be approved by the HOA board and meet certain design standards.