

HELP DESK

How to spring clean like a pro



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Experts say the list of things we need in our cleaning caddies is actually fairly short.

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This is one story in our series called Help Desk, in which Globe writers seek answers to some of the many questions life poses — especially life in this particular part of the world.

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Spring weather is finally creeping in, and for many of us, that means a deep-down urge to do a deep clean at home, shaking out the staleness of a closed-window winter. But it can be intimidating to figure out where to start. Here's advice from the experts on how to spring clean like a pro.

Create your game plan

Melissa Homer, chief cleaning officer at MaidPro, explains the difference between house cleaning and housekeeping: House cleaning is the removal of dirt and soil; housekeeping is moving and removing things and tidying. Housekeeping comes before house cleaning.

Before Homer begins any project, she creates a game plan. It is essential to walk around the entire space to determine the scope of the work before diving in.

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts when it comes to deep cleaning your home. Set realistic, manageable goals to avoid burning out before you finish. Create a plan that dedicates each weekend to one or two rooms, but limit cleaning on those days to about four to five hours so you will be at peak performance. When creating this plan, Homer emphasizes the need to avoid cross-contamination. It is critical to always clean food-contact areas first, especially before bathroom cleaning.

Homer recommends spring cleaners gather up their "weapons of war" before starting. It's also time to stop investing in unnecessary specialty products. This is the refreshingly short list of products Homer says we should have in our portable cleaning caddies:

- ▶ Multi purpose cleaner (disinfects and works on glass)
- ▶ Spray bathroom cleaner
- ▶ Neutral pH spray cleaner (safe on wood and stone)
- ▶ A few scrub brushes and detail brushes
- ▶ Quality microfiber towels
- ▶ Flat microfiber mop

► Delicate microfiber duster

Housekeeping

Housekeeping includes throwing away or rehomeing items that haven't been used in a while or no longer serve your needs. Housekeeping may seem unnecessary, but it will significantly declutter your space and make all subsequent cleaning easier.

Kathy Vines, owner of [Clever Girl Organizing](#) in Melrose, has been helping people organize their homes for six years. Most of Vines's clients have attempted to declutter on their own without much success: It can be an overwhelming, daunting task, and they don't know where to begin.

This is when Vines steps in. The first step is working with clients to set a goal for what they want out of the space. What serves someone in their current life may not be the same thing that previously served them. Prioritize tidying rooms that will provide immediate gratification: perhaps it's the mudroom for a busy family, or the bedroom for someone who comes home from work just in time to crawl into bed.

Sam Bergman, owner of [Merry Maids of Boston](#), said that basements and garages are easy places to start when housekeeping because people often stow things in these places that they really should just discard or sell.

It's important to regularly reassess your needs for your space, and reflect on why you are holding onto something. Just for the memories, or perhaps because you'll feel guilty about throwing it away? If you're always reaching for the new replacement, it's hard to justify why you need to keep the old one around.

After parting with all the stuff that's causing clutter and stress, Homer recommends giving all remaining items a home. Try incorporating trays (lots of them!); putting small items in trays helps organize makeup counters, bathroom vanities, or any other space.



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The first thing to do in each room is vacuum everything you can possibly reach, and take advantage of the wand extension of your vacuum.

House cleaning

Follow the game plan that you created, and clean from room to room based on immediate gratification. Homer even advises using a laundry basket to barricade yourself in the room that you're cleaning. Not only will this keep you from escaping until the job is done, it will also hold items that do not belong in the room you're cleaning and need to be put elsewhere.

The first thing to do in each room is vacuum everything you can possibly reach. Vacuum the ceiling, windows, ceiling fan, walls, furniture, and floors until everything is dustless to the touch. Take advantage of the wand extension of your vacuum — this will save your body from a lot of soreness. Thoroughly vacuuming will reduce the time you spend in other phases of cleaning. Pay special attention to ceiling fans as they tend to house a ton of dust; Sam advises getting as close as possible and using your hands to clean each blade.

In addition to mopping the floors, cleaning the bathrooms, and other customary tasks that should be done often, Bergman said we should remember to clean the inside of the refrigerator and the oven, wipe down cabinets, and clean all windows, inside and out. Most of us don't realize how much grime can cloud our windows until we've washed them, which cleaning experts say we should do twice a year.

As for washing walls, Homer says most people don't really need to mop their walls. Spot cleaning is sufficient.

Regular maintenance

All of the professionals agree on one thing: Maintenance is much more important (and easier!) than doing a semiannual deep clean. Bergman strongly advises keeping up with any residue or build-up near kitchen vents, as failing to do so can mean they will stop working.

If you make a commitment to dedicate a couple hours to your home each weekend, you will never need to spend this much time cleaning ever again. If you have not touched your baseboards in years, you're going to be scrubbing for hours; however, if you keep up with it, you can quickly swipe over them with a microfiber cloth and multipurpose cleaner.

Homer emphasizes the importance of setting realistic goals; remember that cleaned and restored are not the same thing. It's OK to accept that things are getting older and won't ever look brand new again. You can focus on bringing things back to new once you've gotten to a place where everything is clean; the immediate focus is decluttering and creating a clean space.

If all of this seems overwhelming, just remember that making even a minor change to a single space in your home will probably leave you — and where you live — feeling refreshed.

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