

# LIVING GREEN

## Education for a Healthy Future

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HAVE NOTHING  
IN YOUR HOUSE THAT  
YOU DO NOT KNOW  
TO BE USEFUL, OR  
BELIEVE TO BE  
BEAUTIFUL.  
-WILLIAM MORRIS

### DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE LIVING GREEN PROGRAM?

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### SAVING ENERGY IS A SNAP

#### *End of the Heating Season*

This is the time of year where many of us are opening up our windows and getting ready for spring. What many don't think about is cleaning, repairing or replacing our heating systems. This prevents us from having to deal with it come fall when we turn the heat up.

If you have a furnace then you probably have a filter. There are two types of filters: disposable and reusable. During the heating season it is a good tip to check and replace disposable filters once a month. These filters remove airborne particles before they damage a furnace's blower motor. When not replaced regularly, it can make your furnace work harder and produce poor indoor air. Location of the filter for your system can be found in the owner's manual. They usually have cardboard frames that make for easy disposal. After you remove the filter, check the dimensions written on the frame and replace with a new one.

The process is a little different for reusable filters. With these models, the filter will be located inside the furnace, maybe in the return air vent. If the filter has a plastic frame, then it is reusable. To clean this filter, vacuum the filter and the area surrounding it to remove large pieces of dust. Next, take it outside and rinse the dust out and remove particles from the screen. Allow it to dry completely before returning to the furnace.

What if you don't have a furnace, but electric baseboards? Cleaning and maintaining baseboard systems are just as important. Unless you have pets and a lot of dust you should only have to clean them once or twice a year. Before you clean them make sure that they are off and electricity is turned off at the breaker. If you have a lot of dust build-up you may want to use a damp cloth, vinegar or water to wipe off the coils. For mild build-up, use Fabric softener sheets, dry cloth or an old sock with a toilet wand inserted into it to help dust small crevices.

# LIVING GREEN Spring Cleaning

## EVERY DROP COUNTS

### *Change to Faucet Aerators*

In a typical household kitchen and bathroom faucets dispense up to 3.5 gallons of water per minute. This may not seem like a lot, but it adds up quickly. An easy way to save water in your home is to install low flow aerators on all of your faucets.

Faucet aerators act as a filter adding air to water and controlling the water flow. By installing aerators you can reduce the water flow to as low as ½ gallon per minute. When you go to purchase aerators here are some things to keep in mind. Most faucet aerators are marked with the amount of water they allow to pass through. This is measured in gallons per minute (gpm), and there are four general categories. If an aerator says it is "Full flow" it doesn't restrict water usage. "Standard" water flow for aerators is 2.2 gpm, while "water saving" flow is considered 1.5 gpm. Some aerators are designed for maximum water savings and have a flow of just 1.0 gpm which saves up to 55% more water than a standard flow. The beauty of an aerator is that you probably won't even notice the difference. Next, is your faucet female or male? This may seem like an odd question, but it is determined by threading on the outside (MALE) or inside (FEMALE). Once you have determined the threading, then you would purchase an aerator with opposite threading. One tip that I have found in replacing aerators is to take the old one off and take it to the hardware store with me to determine threading and size.

In order to keep them operating efficiently you need to regularly clean them. First, to remove you can either unscrew it by hand or use a pair of pliers. If you have to use pliers make sure to place a rag between the pliers and the aerator to prevent scratching. Turn the pliers and aerator clockwise until it loosens from the faucet. Next, remove the mesh that typically collects minerals & silt. For easy clean-up you may need an old toothbrush to clean the screen. If not, soak the aerator in a bowl filled with a 50/50 solution of vinegar and water for several hours. Finally you can replace the aerator back onto the faucet.

Article Resource: [plumbingsupply.com](http://plumbingsupply.com)

## Non-Toxic Cleaning Alternative

### **Bathroom mold**

Mold in bathroom tile grout is a common problem and can be a health concern. Mix one part hydrogen peroxide (3%) with two parts water in a spray bottle and spray on areas with mold. Wait at least one hour before rinsing or using shower.

## Non-Toxic Cleaning Alternative

### **Disinfectant**

Mix 2 teaspoons borax, 4 tablespoons vinegar and 3 cups hot water. For stronger cleaning power add 1/4 teaspoon liquid castile soap. Wipe on with dampened cloth or use non-aerosol spray bottle.

**Note:** This is not an antibacterial solution.

## HEALTHY HOMES

### *Non-Toxic Cleaning Recipes*

In the U.S., one in three suffers from allergies, asthma, sinusitis or bronchitis (US National Center for Health Statistics). Treatment for these conditions should include reducing synthetic chemicals in the home environment. For many home-cleaning chores, you can make your own cleaning products using the formulas listed below.

There are many inexpensive, easy-to-use natural alternatives which can safely be used in place of commercial household products. Here is a list of common, environmentally safe products which can be used alone or in combination for a wealth of household applications.

# LIVING GREEN Spring Cleaning

## WASTE REDUCTION

### *Donate Items to a Charity*

**Baking Soda** - cleans, deodorizes, softens water, scours.

**Soap** - unscented soap in liquid form, flakes, powders or bars is biodegradable and will clean just about anything. Avoid using soaps which contain petroleum distillates.

**Lemon** - one of the strongest food-acids, effective against most household bacteria.

**Borax** - (sodium borate) cleans, deodorizes, disinfects, softens water, cleans wallpaper, painted walls and floors. Considered a mild skin irritant similar to baking soda.

**White Vinegar** - cuts grease, removes mildew, odors, some stains and wax build-up.

**Washing Soda** - or SAL Soda is sodium carbonate decahydrate, a mineral. Washing soda cuts grease, removes stains, softens water, cleans wall, tiles, sinks and tubs.

**Isopropyl Alcohol** - is an excellent disinfectant.

**Cornstarch** - can be used to clean windows, polish furniture, shampoo carpets and rugs.

Every spring, my family finds items that we no longer have use for around the house. They may be gently used, but I think to myself, besides taking them to donation centers are there local charities whose clients can find use for them? Many non-profits prefer a monetary donation, but there are those that will put to use those gently used items you no longer need. Before you choose to donate you may want to do some research.

First, visit a website like: [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org), [www.justgive.org](http://www.justgive.org) to find a list of charities based on topics of interest. Charities on these websites are non-profits and tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status with the IRS.

Second, contact the charity and see if they can take the item(s) and what are the procedures for delivering them. There may be specific details that are not listed on the websites.

Lastly, make sure to get rid of any personal information that could be associated with the item. For example, electronic devices that may contain passwords or financial data stored in them. One employee at a local donation center found \$100 from a coat that was dropped off. Just make sure to do a once over before delivering any items to the charity.

## DIY MINOR HOME REPAIRS *Maintenance Checklist*

A regular schedule of preventative home maintenance can save expensive problems down the road. Here are some tips to help keep your home in tip-top condition:

### **Weekly/Periodically**

- Clean leaves and debris out of basement window wells.
- Rake debris away from around the foundation of your house and other structures on your property.
- Vacuum your carpet with a powerful upright vacuum cleaner at least once a week.

### **Monthly**

- Clean faucet aerators and shower heads with vinegar to get rid of mineral deposits.
- Clean the drain pan on your frost-free refrigerator.
- Inspect your dishwasher for leaks.
- Clean your kitchen exhaust fan filter and fan blades.
- During the fall and winter months, check your heating system air filter and replace it if needed.
- Maintain drains by pouring boiling water down them. If a drain becomes clogged, pour a cup of baking soda into the drain – flush with three cups of hot water. If that doesn't work, use one-half cup of baking soda and then pour one-half cup of plain vinegar down the drain.
- Pour water down any unused drains.
- Vacuum heat registers, vents and refrigerator coils.

### **Spring**

- Inspect weather-stripping around windows and doors.
- Clean dirt and dust from around the air conditioner compressor.
- Change your air conditioner filter
- Inspect screens and repair any holes to keep flying insects out of the house.



### **DIY Maintenance Checklist** Continued

- Hose off the exterior of your home.
- Scrub any mildew off of the exterior of the house and treat decks for mildew and fungus.
- Trim any trees or shrubs away from the house.
- Contact a licensed coolant contractor to inspect and service your air conditioner.
- Use silicone spray on patio door and window tracks for smooth operation.
- Change the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detector.

#### **Fall**

- Inspect storm window, clean them if needed and seal holes.
- Have your wood-burning fireplace inspected, cleaned and repaired to prevent chimney fires and carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Contact a licensed heating contractor to inspect and service your gas heater or furnace to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Your local utility company will often provide this service for free.
- If you use a hot water system for heating, drain the expansion tank, check the water pressure, and bleed your radiators.
- Change the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detector.

#### **Annually**

- Seal exterior cracks in stucco.
- Touch up exterior paint.
- Drain water heater and check pressure valve.
- Re-caulk showers, tubs and sinks to prevent water damage to walls.
- Wax marble counter tops with turtle wax.
- Maintain a contract with a pest control company to prevent or eliminate insect infestations such as termites or carpenter ants.
- Inspect hot water heat system radiators and convectors.
- Septic tanks should be checked and cleaned once a year.
- Check the pressure and expiration date on all of your fire extinguishers.
- Check your clothes dryer vent and hose for lint buildup. Clean if necessary to prevent a fire.

**Article Resource: [DIYnetwork.com](http://DIYnetwork.com)**



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### **SPRING CLEANING FOR HOME SAFETY**

Written by: Jan Doherty, Spokane Fire Department

Spring cleaning is also an important activity from the perspective of Spokane Fire Department. Now is the time to do a "fire safety sweep" of both the inside and outside of your home. Get rid of any items that add clutter to the interior of your home because they could block your escape plus add fuel to any fire. Make sure that all possible window and door exits are easily accessible. Clear the area around your stove of hand towels, plastics, cardboard containers or other combustible materials.

Tidy up your yard and porches to eliminate easy targets such as old cardboard boxes, wood or furniture that could attract an arson fire. Clear off dead leaves or pine needles from the roof and lawn. Make sure your barbecue is cleaned and located a safe clearance from wooden siding or decks. Check the size, color and placement of your address numerals so that your home could easily be located in the event of any emergency response.