

## A little elbow grease and - ugh! - focus

Tips from the pros to get you through spring cleaning



Using a caddy or a belt to hold cleaning supplies will free up your hands and create fewer trips to the sink.

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Though spring can be fickle in New England, we're hedging our bets, stashing away the last of our winter clothing and giving the house a good spring cleaning. But where to start? All that dusting, scrubbing, and closet pruning - depending on your level of ambition - can be daunting for even the most committed of clean freaks. We consulted some cleaning and organization experts for some tips on where to start, and how best to get the job done.

## **Weed out things you don't want**

Before you get down to cleaning, do some preliminary purging. Getting rid of things you no longer want or need makes cleaning easier because you have less clutter to deal with, says Carol Gonzalez, owner of Organization for Business and Home in Jamaica Plain.

"Everyone has things in the closet that make them itch, or that they look bilious in," she says. "Get rid of those things and try to build in time to donate stuff." If you're not sure you can part with a certain pan or pair of shoes, put it in a box away from the storage area to be re-evaluated at a later time, recommends Jane Lawson, a cleaning and organization consultant based in Peabody. This can save you mental anguish while freeing up space in your pantry or closet, an important prerequisite to cleaning.

"Even if your kitchen counter is driving you crazy, if you don't clean out your kitchen cupboards first, you'll have no place to put the things on your counter," Gonzalez says. Similarly, "if the top of your desk is driving you crazy and you don't have space in your file cabinet, you won't have a place for the things on your desk."

## **Do the most dreaded tasks first**

Whether you're sorting through stuff or have moved on to cleaning, it's better to dive right into the jobs that take the most time and energy than to ease into them with relatively painless tasks, the experts agree.

"Think about what bothers you the most, and start there," says Dawn Link, a certified professional organizer and owner of Resolutions in Stoneham. "If it's a junk drawer in the kitchen, tackle that first."

By committing to a task while your ambition is fully intact, you're less likely to run out of steam midway. "It could be that you've taken everything out of the drawer and just end up shoving it back in, saying 'at least I tried,'" she says. "If you have energy when you finish, you can do another drawer."

The most physically demanding and time-consuming cleaning jobs - generally those in the kitchen - are also the ones to do first, Lawson adds. Getting the most demanding chores out of the way might give you the lift you need to finish the cleaning.

"If you do the easier things first, you're tired by the time you get to the bigger

things," she says.

### **Focus on things you often neglect**

If you're going to make time for a thorough spring cleaning, focus on the things you usually avoid, recommends Michael Chace, owner of Maids Express in Boston.

"The biggest thing to go after is all the dust," Chace says. "That's the cleaning task that people put aside and just don't do. If you get rid of that dust, it helps the air quality."

Besides baseboards and windowsills, there are the nooks and crannies behind headboards and furniture and window blinds "dust magnets," Chace says. He recommends using simple terry cloth rags, which can be bought cheap from janitorial supply stores such as All Brands Vacuum in Brighton or Lancelot Janitorial and Paper Products in Lynn.

"Some people like the gimmicky things. Swiffer makes a disposable duster, but I find it doesn't work as well. Plus, you can reuse the rags."

### **Use the right supplies**

For routine cleaning, baking soda is a cheap, gentle, and environmentally friendly cleanser for sinks, countertops, the bathtub. Still, if your cleaning spells come but once or twice a year, you'll probably need stronger chemicals, Lawson says.

"If you have a serious job to do, it's OK to use harsh products," she says. "After that, you can use milder ones."

Basic as it sounds, make sure your products will work on whatever you're cleaning. "A lot of people have a misconception that Pine-Sol is for floor cleaning, but it's not recommended for wood floors," Chace says.

Certain products can be used in unexpected ways. John Meek, owner of Chapman Cleaning in Brighton, says lining a shower door with a thin coat of furniture polish every three months or so "will keep it from getting scummy."

### **Stay focused and keep moving**

Spring cleaning requires a single-mindedness, Lawson says. Resist the temptation to turn on the TV or to make trips to the washing machine.

"It's like exercise, you want to keep going," she says. "You don't want to stop and go."

Thinking ahead while you clean will help you stay on task, Lawson adds. "If I'm cleaning the counter around the toaster, I know I'll need to move to the area around the coffeepot," she says. "You need to try to get your hands to keep up with your brain."

Carrying a few sponges at a time instead of one will mean fewer trips to the sink. Using a caddy or a belt to hold cleaning supplies (Lawson sells such a belt on her website) will free up both hands.

Timing yourself while you clean can also help you stay focused, both Lawson and Link say.

"I think people are surprised to see how much they can get done in a certain amount of time," Link says.

Knowing how long it takes to clean the kitchen or the bathroom can also give you a benchmark for the next time, adds Lawson. "If you can save five minutes in each room, it makes a big difference if you have a large home."

### **Opt out**

If all this seems too overwhelming, you can always use a cleaning service.

"If you have breathing problems or you just don't want to clean," says Gonzalez, "part of organizing and cleaning is giving yourself permission to have someone else do it."

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