

52 tips to keep your house humming in 2015

Ava Henrickson Journal staff

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Most people considering cleaning windows a giant chore. But having the right tools can make it less trying. Use a soft sponge to wash them with a cleaning solution of either vinegar and water or a small squirt of dish-washing soap and water. Then use a squeegee to remove the solution.

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Stacking home-maintenance projects, honey-do lists and spring cleaning on top of an already hectic schedule can make completing these sometimes mundane tasks seem like nothing but a pipe dream. But what if you did a little bit each week throughout the year?

As 2015 dawns, we offer 52 things to put on and check off your lists in a more manageable manner this year.

January

Take Christmas decorations down and pack them away. Recycle lights that don't work.

Check furnace filter. "That is huge," said David Strand, service technician at K&D Appliance Service. "We do more service calls in a year for situations created by dirty filters than anything else. Check it once a month. Tie it in with something else you do, like flip the calendar. You probably won't have to change it that often. If it's clean, let it go another month. If it's dirty, replace it."

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Fill holes in the walls and touch up the paint in your living room and kitchen.

Pull out refrigerator and stove and clean underneath them. Vacuum the refrigerator coils. Clean the range hood and change the filter.

February

Clean heating and cooling registers, grilles and vents. Heating, ventilation and air conditioning ductwork needs to be professionally cleaned every seven to eight years, according to Strand.

Clean the vacuum cleaner.

For newer beds, remove and wash the mattress cover. Older beds require a bit more work.

"The older style (mattresses) like innerspring, they still recommend flipping and turning them, normally about every six months," Lynn Delameter, owner of Black Hills Sleep Center, said. And wash the mattress pad. "With a conventional mattress, there's dead skin. I think people do vacuum them (to clean it)."

Remove scratches on door frames, hard wood floors and furniture with a Tibet almond stick.

March

Take down and clean all indoor light fixtures.

Clean the oven.

Fill holes and touch up the paint in the bathrooms and bedrooms.

Inspect attic. Check vents and look for signs of rodents or other pests. "Raise stored items off the floor and move them away from walls, creating open space that doesn't feel safe for mice and squirrels to make a home," suggests Roxanne Gates with All Seasons Pest Control.

Check faucets for leaks and replace washers if needed. Soak shower head(s) overnight in vinegar to remove mineral deposits.

April

Power rake the lawn. "Power raking should only be done in early spring, or before consistent growth occurs," Brock Heid, owner of Professional Choice Lawn Care, said. "Power raking removes the excessive amount of thatch directly above the roots." Heid recommends power raking every two to three years.

Take smoke detectors down and vacuum them and the ceiling or wall mount. Dust can cause a smoke detector to go off even if there is no smoke. Check fire extinguishers and carbon monoxide alarms.

Have the HVAC system serviced. "Your system should be checked once a year," Strand said. "You don't have to do it twice. Do it in the spring and have the air conditioner and furnace checked at the same time." (Be sure to check the filters once a month.)

Clean the garage out. Hold a rummage sale or donate unneeded items.

May

Aerate the grass. Aeration is typically in the spring, "but can be done at any time during the season, as long as your lawn can recover from the damage," Heid said. "It loosens up compacted soil and improves the air and water movement within the root system."

Clean patios and decks. Power wash and seal, if necessary.

Clean ceiling fans. Open a pillowcase and put it over the blade. Wipe the dust on top, which will catch in the case on the bottom. Change direction of the blades.

Fertilize the lawn. "Fertilizing should be done three times a year, in the spring, summer and fall to maintain a healthy, vibrant lawn," Heid said. "A healthy lawn will eliminate the need for herbicides. By providing the lawn with the necessary nutrients, it will typically require less water."

Wash all the windows on the outside.

June

Inspect foundation for cracks. Caulk exterior areas where water or air can get through: joints, around pipes or wires that go in to the house, and around windows and doors.

Do a pest-control assessment of the house and yard. "Blocking access to safe hiding and breeding spaces will encourage pests to find an alternate home," said Gates. "Being proactive, rather than reactive, can halt pest problems before they even start." Other suggestions: clear away debris inside and out. Rake yard waste away from foundations. Trim shrubs to reduce hiding places. Cut over hanging trees to keep animals from easily gaining access to the roof. Move woodpiles away from the house and raise them up off the ground to prevent any rodent or ant infestations from gaining access to the house. Fix leaky pipes and eliminate standing water. "All creatures need water in one form or another," Gates said.

Inspect siding for damage or peeling paint. Paint the house if needed. Wash vinyl siding.

Check the roof for problems, if safely able to do so. Replace missing and damaged shingles.

July

Tighten all loose screws in the house: knobs, handles, racks.

Inspect basement or crawl space for dampness. Clean and organize any stored items and raise them off the floor.

Wash all windows on the inside.

Fertilize the lawn, again. "The summer application is a maintainer," said Heid. "Naturally grass growth slows down in summer because of the heat. Fertilizer will help with heat stress, along with proper water. Watering is key."

August

Clean the thermostat. Consider installing a programmable thermostat to save energy.

Clean rugs and shampoo carpet.

Insulate electrical outlets and switch plates with foam insulators. Add child protector plugs to the outlets for extra protection.

Check baseboards for damage. Repair and seal any gaps with caulk.

Drain hot water heater and remove sediment.

September

Check driveway and sidewalks for cracks and repair them before winter.

Clean and cover or store outdoor furniture.

Plant trees and shrubs. "Fall is the best time to plant pretty much anything," Jim Kattke, owner of Horizon Landscape, said. "The ground is warm and roots will be able to grow."

Winterize air conditioner. Remove window units or cover them. Cover outside central air unit with a tarp or sheeting.

October

Seal cracks in window and door moldings to keep the cold out.

Fertilize the lawn one last time. "As grass begins to go dormant, make sure your lawn is healthy to sustain life through the winter when there is no water, no nutrients," said Heid. "It's designed to keep the root systems healthy."

Inspect snow shovels and insure snow blowers are ready for winter.

Clean ashes from the fireplace. Have chimney professionally cleaned.

November

After the leaves have fallen, remove debris from gutters and downspouts and flush with water. Check the joints and tighten loose brackets.

Clean ceiling fans. Change direction of the blades.

Apply weather stripping around doors and windows to keep heat in.

Inspect and replace caulking around showers, bathtubs and sinks.

Clean garbage disposal with ice cubes and rock salt or vinegar, which freezes and "scrubs" out debris. If it smells, cut up a lemon and run it through the disposal.

December

Take down curtains, drapes and/or blinds. Wash or dry clean.

Wash the washing machine with hot water and bleach then hot water and vinegar. Move your dryer and clean underneath it. Clean out your dryer duct. Keep the flexible duct as short as possible. "Each one of those ribs (in the flexible duct) is a collecting spot for lint. It just starts building up," said Strand. "The less resistance you get to the air flow, the better the dryer is going to dry." Strand also stresses cleaning the lint filter with every load.

Clean out shower and sink drains.

Water on a warmer day. "You want to keep trees and some shrubs watered in the winter. People tend to forget to do that," Kattke said. "Once a month go out and run the water slow on them so it absorbs. You can't do that if that ground is frozen. Continue to do in January and February."

