

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Spring Cleaning

Written by Jackie E. Ogden, CFCS – FACS Agent, Chatham County



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(Image Source: Canva Pro)

The trees are leafing out, flowers are blooming, and pollen is in the air. Spring has arrived! This is a great time to give your home a thorough cleaning. According to a 2023 Spring Cleaning Survey conducted by the American Cleaning Institute (ACI), the majority (74%) of American households engage in spring cleaning every year, some every few years, and only 5% never engage in spring cleaning. Survey findings indicated that 47% of consumers anticipate cleaning or organizing to be the same as previous years while 45% consumers expect cleaning or organizing more than usual this year. Consumers are motivated to clean because they want a healthier home and cleaning is one of the most effective ways to improve the health of your living environment.

Spring cleaning is the perfect time to wash windows, clean appliances, vacuum furniture, wash bedspreads and window treatments, scrub floors and even clean out the garage and basement.

Start by selecting good equipment to help make cleaning more effective and easier. The best type of vacuum is a HEPA, which removes 99.97% of airborne particles that are 0.3 microns or larger. A vacuum with a HEPA-type filter is still good but removes only 85-90% of airborne particles. A good vacuum is a major investment but is worth the expense if someone in your household suffers from asthma or allergies. For general surface cleaning use a microfiber mop and cloths. Researchers report that microfiber captures more bacteria and uses less water and cleaning products than cotton mops and cleaning cloths.

There are numerous household cleaning product options. As indicated in the 2023 ACI Survey, the most important quality for cleaning products is effectiveness. A helpful resource to learn more about the products you purchase is The Consumer Product Information Database <https://www.whatsinproducts.com>. It is a comprehensive list of cleaning products and their ingredients. You may decide to make green cleaning products, such as the green cleaning recipes available from UGA Extension (<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/green-cleaning>). Remember, any cleaning product that contains fragrance, chemical or natural, adds volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to the indoor air, which can have negative impacts on people with allergies and asthma.

A clean home has both physical and mental health benefits. Cleaning decreases exposure to contaminants and reduces risk of injury from trips and falls. As you clean and organize your home, you are decluttering your mind and gaining a sense of control over your space.

Asthma—Creating a Healthier Home

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Professor & Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, asthma affects about 25 million people in the U.S., including 6 million children under the age of 18. It is more prevalent among families with lower incomes, and it is one of the leading chronic diseases in children ages 18 and younger.



(Image Source: Canva Pro)

Asthma is a disease that affects your lungs. In severe cases, it can be life-threatening. Asthma attacks are set off by "triggers," which vary among people. You can manage some of the environmental factors in your home that could lead to an asthma attack for you or a family member. Below are some simple things you can do to reduce the asthma and allergy triggers in your home.

- **Eliminate smoke inside your home.** This includes tobacco products and e-cigarettes.
- **Lessen exposure to pets.** Prevent pets from going into bedrooms or other sleeping areas.
- **Decrease dust mites.** Cover mattresses, box springs, and pillows with dust proof or allergen-proof covers. Wash bedding weekly.
- **Clean your home often.** Use a microfiber mop or HEPA vacuum on the floors, and dust with a microfiber cloth.
- **Reduce mold.** Maintain indoor relative humidity below 60%, ideally below 50%.

Work with your doctor to determine what environmental factors affect your asthma and develop a plan to manage those potential triggers.

Read the new UGA Extension Publication about asthma.

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1270>



Spring Home Maintenance

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Professor & Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist



(Image Source: Canva Pro)

The best way to avoid costly home repairs is to do regular home inspections and maintenance. Plan on doing a thorough check on your home's condition in the spring and fall. You can do it all in one day, or spread it out over several weekends.

The UGA Extension Home Maintenance checklist (<https://t.uga.edu/8Vu>) is a helpful tool to use for assessing your home. A good place to start is by inspecting the exterior. Go out to the street and observe your home. Does it have curb appeal? If not, what things do you need to do to make your home safer and freshen it up for spring? Below are some basic spring maintenance tips.

- Inspect the foundation for cracking, blocked vents, and leaks.
- Clean the gutters. Even if you cleaned the gutters in the Fall, they may be full again with leaves and twigs that fell over the winter.
- Wash the outside of your house, especially if you see a lot of mold growth.
- Repaint the exterior if the paint is peeling, cracking, fading or blistering.
- Trim tree branches that overhang the roof.
- Clean the deck and treat it with a protective finish if needed.
- Repair cracked and crumbling driveways and walkways.
- Have the heating and cooling systems inspected by a professional.
- Check around windows and doors for air leaks. Caulk and seal as needed.
- Inspect the attic for evidence of leaks, condensation, and unwanted visitors.
- Clean the kitchen exhaust hood and air filter.
- Replace the smoke detector and carbon monoxide alarm batteries. If you don't have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms, install them. Make sure your fire extinguishers are fully charged. Re-charge if needed or purchase one if you do not currently own one.

Protect Your Skin Year Around

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Professor and Extension Housing & Indoor Environment Specialist

It may only be spring, but you should always protect yourself and your family from too much ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Exposure to UV leads to sunburns, premature aging, eye damage and skin cancer. Children under 6 months should be kept out of the sun and dressed in long-sleeved shirts, long pants and wide-brimmed hats. To find a safe sunscreen, visit the Environmental Working Group website (<https://www.ewg.org/sunscreen/>).



(Image Source: Canva Pro)

What to do with Old Paint

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Professor and Extension Housing & Indoor Environment Specialist



When you buy an existing house or help clean out a house where someone has lived for a long time, you often find used cans of paint in the garage or basement. What do you do with them? Ideally, you can use it for another painting project. If you use 1 gallon of recycled paint instead of buying a new can of paint, this saves 100 kilowatt-hours of energy and keeps 115 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the air.

If this isn't an option, because the paint is separated or dried out, then check with your local waste management company or visit Earth 911 https://search.earth911.com/?utm_source=earth911-header.

Oil-based and water-based paints are disposed of differently. Oil-based paint will most likely need to be disposed of as a household hazardous waste (HHW). If your community doesn't offer HHW collection, you can add kitty litter or shredded newspaper to the can to absorb the paint before throwing it into the trash.

Recycling may be an option for water-based paint; however, in some areas latex paint is excluded from HHW collection. Check with your waste management company to learn about special collection events.

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist

~ Diane Bales, UGA Extension Human Development Specialist

Clean up spilled glitter by picking it up with play dough or tape.

Use toothpaste to clean sneakers. Put a small amount of white toothpaste on an old toothbrush and scrub the white parts of your sneakers to get them looking like new again.

Use rubber gloves to remove unwanted pet hair. Slide your hands in them and run them over areas that need cleaning. Rinse the gloves in running water to remove hair.

Sparkling glass dishes can be achieved by cleaning the container with dish soap and scrubbing with a ball of aluminum foil.



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