

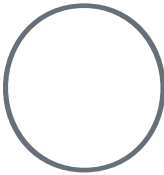


the [♥]comfort of things

SPRING CLEANING

There are certain things in your home that are like old friends: they always cheer you up. This month we feel the love for a clean and pleasant house

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**



One of the bonuses of the winter months is that dirt, dust and general scruffiness can be ignored. As we spend the long, dark nights hibernating, cosied up in an armchair with the curtains drawn, cobwebs gather in corners, dust layers shelves, fingerprints appear on woodwork, sofas accumulate crisps, loose change and pet hair. Although we know all of this is going on, it's easy to overlook, and even easier to doing nothing about it. But with the first blast of spring sunshine through a smeary window, everything looks different. All of winter's neglect is exposed. Suddenly grubbiness won't do. There's nothing for it but to dig out the duster, pull the

"Dusting forgotten places will make you feel righteous"

furniture away from the walls and fill a bucket with hot soapy water. It is time to Spring Clean*. A thorough clean-up is often more satisfying than day-to-day cleaning.

Think of it as a project to be tackled over a weekend, say, and it becomes an achievement. Clean woodwork catches the light and sparkles; shower screens are clear where once they were opaque. The house feels civilised. *You* feel civilised. It was worth the trouble.

Eschew bossy orders from the likes of Martha Stewart whose exhausting spring cleaning regimen includes wiping the coils behind a fridge, in favour of big wins. A Hoover behind and under furniture rather than just the noticeable bits, is a good place to start. As is a spot of decluttering. Dusting forgotten places like picture frames and the tops of cupboards, cleaning light switches and inside the microwave and washing machine will make you feel righteous, and justifiably so.

Once you have completed all of this, you will want to keep the house pristine for as long as possible. Remember prevention is better than cleaning: introduce a no-shoes-in-the-house rule, instruct family members to actually pick things up, employ a cleaner every so often. Spring cleaning can be rewarding but it doesn't have to be relentless.

* It is also the time to put on our Spotify playlist, page 113



A GUIDE TO ECO CLEANING

Green alternatives to environmental and health damaging chemical-based cleaners

For doing the dishes Method's Pomegranate washing-up liquid is free from chlorine and phosphates and smells delicious; £2.25 for 523ml, biggreensmile.com

For floor mopping Dr Bronner's Organic Liquid Castile soap is free from synthetic dyes, fragrances and preservatives and is as good for floors as it is for bodies; £10.50 for 473ml, ethicalsuperstore.com

For kitchen cleaning Kinn Living's Eco Friendly Kitchen Cleaner's essential oils disinfect naturally; £4.25 for 500ml, kinn-living.com

For scrubbing dirty plates LoofCo washing-up pad is made from natural loofah and coconut fibres and is biodegradable; £2.75, greenbrands.co.uk

For cleaning glass Good for Glass, harnesses the cleaning power of lemon oil to bring the sparkle back to glass and mirrors; £5.60 for 500ml, mangleandwringer.co.uk

For cleaning the toilet US company Seventh Generation's Natural Toilet Bowl Cleaner smells sweetly of cypress and fir; £3.83 for 946ml, evitamins.com

THREE TO MAKE, BUY OR CUSTOMISE

Put on an apron and suddenly you mean business. Accessorise with a pair of rubber gloves and you're all set for maximum dirt-busting



1 MAKE
Buy a tea towel you like enough to wear* (Tunnocks tea towel, above, £9, gilliankyle.com) and a couple of metres of ribbon. Hang the ribbon around your neck and snip it off at about 20cm past your collarbone on either side. Hem, then place each end a third of the way in from the edge on either side of the shortest end of the tea towel. Sew in place. Fold the corners of the apron down to form a bib and stitch. Cut and hem two more lengths of ribbon and sew in place on either side of the apron below the folded-down corners to tie around you and keep it in place.



2 BUY
The point of aprons, of course, is to protect your clothes. To this end, the more of you they cover the better, which makes a bib apron a better bet than a waist one. The more hard-wearing the fabric, the better: PVC is a good option because you can wipe it clean, but for a robust, artisan version, little beats Labour And Wait's bib apron, (labourandwait.co.uk, £48, above). Made from cotton duck (tightly woven fabric, like canvas) with brass eyelets and with two pockets (one with a gusset), it is tough enough to tackle any chore.



3 CUSTOMISE
Add a bit of pizzazz to your spring cleaning by buying a plain white apron and making it your own. Painter and decorator suppliers sell 100% white cotton bib aprons, from £5, or try johnlewis.com, which has a craft apron (above), from £8. What you do with it is up to you but you could scribble all over it with fabric markers (£20 for 12, hobbycraft.co.uk), render it psychedelic with tie-dye (One-Step Tie-Dye Kit, £20, hobbycraft.co.uk) or sew on fringing and sequins – a valiant attempt to make cleaning feel like a glamorous activity.



HOME QUANDARIES

I know that a clean and tidy house has the potential to introduce order and calm into my home, but I believe there is more to life than dusting or pushing a Hoover around the living room. Are there any ways to spring clean without actually having to do much?

Answer in brief: one or two carefully chosen activities will bring instant freshness to the murkiest interior. The most effective quick fix to help the lazy or indifferent householder is to wash the windows (try a Karcher Window Vacuum, £21.99, refurbished, karcheroutlet.co.uk), or employ an actual window cleaner. Once the grimy film has been eliminated, light will bounce around your home bestowing freshness upon it. Another is to clear kitchen work surfaces of unused items and clutter, then give them a thorough wipe with an anti-bacterial cleaner. This will give the impression of a well kept kitchen. And, finally, throw stuff out. Nothing looks as messy as old Sunday supplements and pizza boxes strewn hither and thither.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LOUPE IMAGES; PLAIN PICTURE

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Linen scrim | £6
Wash and polish glass with no smearing. labourandwait.co.uk

Clarissa Hulse apron and oven gauntlet set | £30
Pretty pattern with a metallic finish. clarissahulse.com

Hog bristle broom | £85
Made by brushmakers Turner & Harper, this beauty will last forever plainuseful.com

Oval dish brush | £2
With a jolly blue and wooden handle. In store at Tiger Stores only. uk.flyingtiger.com

Hedgehog table brush | £12
A bristly fellow to help with chores. shop.nationaltrust.org.uk

Copper scourer | £5.50
Shifts stubborn dirt without scratching. plainuseful.com

Menu sweeper and funnel | £60
Probably the coolest dustpan and brush in the world. nest.co.uk

Redecker galvanised bucket | £30 for two
Substantial and with wooden handles. plainuseful.com