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the lazy person's guide to housekeeping



Save time and money

by Teri Cettina

When friends visit, they often tease my husband and me about being compulsive housecleaners. While it's true that we like having a tidy home, we probably spend less time cleaning than most of our pals.

Our secret? We're a little lazy. We're just not interested in spending hours dusting, vacuuming, mopping and putting things away. Over time we've collected tips on how to keep a house looking good in practically no time.

clean only what you have to

Most of us don't have time for the elaborate deep-cleanings our grandmothers used to do. Fortunately, you don't need to work that hard to keep your house clean if you tackle the job strategically.

Be your own boss "If it isn't dirty, don't clean it!" says Don Aslett, author of *No Time to Clean!* Clean according to your own standards. For instance, if your standard is "I clean windows when they have lots of visible fingerprints," then you'll only have to clean windows when they

get to that point. That could be once a week or once a year, depending on your household.

Don't fuss over furniture You don't need to vacuum upholstery too often to keep crumbs off your couch and chairs. Instead, remove crumbs and dust regularly with a plastic handheld whisk broom and a dustpan, says Jeff Campbell, author of *Speed Cleaning*. "It's faster than vacuuming and does a great job."

Dust on the horizontal Flat surfaces are where dust falls and spills occur, says Campbell, so focus your efforts there. That means dusting tabletops but not legs, window ledges but not walls.

Spot-clean cabinets For routine cleaning, wipe cabinet doors and entry doors just around the knobs and handles, where dirt collects. Spot-clean marks, spills or dirt. You need only wipe down the entire door or cabinet once a month.

zap your hot zones

Most houses have one or two "hot spots" in every room, says organizing and cleaning expert Marla Cilley, a.k.a. "The FlyLady" and author of *Sink Reflections*. These are places like the chair next to your bed, your treadmill or the table near the front door that seem to naturally collect clutter.

Use the five-minute rule Once you've identified your family's hot spots, Cilley suggests you spend five minutes each morning and evening tidying them. Your home will automatically look neater.

Return order Many hot spots are covered with items that need to be returned. Is your dining room table overflowing with overdue library books and videos? Store them in your hall closet in a designated bag. An assigned kitchen drawer can also serve as a temporary

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LAZY HOUSEKEEPING

Continued

(and hidden) holding spot for items you need to return. Make a habit of checking your "returns" spots when you leave home.

Drive away donations Don't let items you're giving to charity clutter up a hallway. Leave a bin in your car trunk and toss in items as you come across them. When the bin is full, it's time to drop off your donations.

tackle messes when they're small

"Most big problems start out small," a yoga teacher once told me. "If you face challenges when they're manageable, you can solve them quickly and leave time for more important pursuits." Apply that same philosophy to housecleaning and organizing.

Don't ignore splatters Wipe up spaghetti sauce splatters and other stove messes while you're cooking. Attack spills in oven burner pans as

soon as they've cooled. It takes only seconds to clean drips while they're fresh, but it could take three times as long to scrub them off later.

Fix it now The same holds true for other minor mishaps. A drawer that sticks may end up accidentally yanked out onto the floor, contents flying in every direction. And leaky faucets and toilets can turn into major expenditures if you wait until they cause floods. Make little repairs often and you'll avoid the big ones.

Do a little daily For example, do one small bathroom task each day, says Carole Pagan, author of the e-book *Secret Confessions of a Clean Freak* (available at commonsenseliving.com). Swish-clean the toilet, wipe the floor or spot-treat any shower mold or discolored grout. If you spend two or three minutes a day speed-cleaning your bathroom, you can avoid having to scrub it down later.

Keep tools handy Store premoistened wipes and a rolling lint or pet-

hair remover in a bathroom drawer. Wipes are great for cleaning toothpaste drips, counters and the toilet seat. Use lint rollers to remove hair and dust from the floor.

bust clutter for good

It's not unusual for folks to spend two hours sifting through piles of permission slips and bills. Break this time trap by assigning everything in your house a permanent home. Every room will automatically look cleaner.

Sort it on the spot Create homes for paperwork, such as a kitchen drawer for kids' permission slips and calendars; a hanging file for bills, receipts and coupons; and baskets for each family member's mail. Then sort mail into its assigned spot as soon as you receive it. Recycle junk mail immediately.

Create a kids' corner Install hooks for coats and backpacks at kids' eye level, just like at school. Hooks are easier than hangers, so kids are



save even more time by...

Dusting off your duster Ostrich-down feather dusters are making a well-deserved comeback. But to use one well, you've got to use it right, says *Speed Cleaning* author Jeff Campbell. At the end of a dusting motion (such as reaching the end of a baseboard), bring the duster to a full stop so dust has a chance to cling to it. Then tap the duster against your lower leg. You'll pick up the dust from the floor when you vacuum.

Giving mops and brooms the brush-off Both tools move dirt around but never totally remove it, says Joe and Debrah Vanchura, owners of the professional cleaning company Joe Vanchura's Helping Hands in Oregon. Instead, vacuum floors, including those in the kitchen and bathroom. Then wipe them with folded, clean cotton diapers (their favorite cleaning rags).

Wearing your tools Many cleaning pros swear by a three-pocket apron (known as a cocktail server's apron) to carry tools and cleaning cloths so you're not always searching for them. Campbell also clips a small plastic bag inside one apron pocket for small garbage. If your apron has fabric loops, hook cleaning bottles onto them for easy access.

Rethinking your dishwasher This handy appliance can clean much more than just dishes. Oven knobs and racks, shower caddies, soap dishes and pet dishes will get squeaky clean in the dishwasher. Just make sure you put smaller items in a net bag so they don't get caught in the dishwasher's motor. And use the air-dry cycle for anything made of plastic or rubber.

Scrubbing selectively Most cleaning products need a little time to do their work, says Don Aslett, author of *No Time to Clean!* Saturate a dirty surface with cleaning solution and let it sit for a few minutes. The mess will dissolve so you can simply wipe it up with a cloth.

more likely to actually use them.

Give your hubby a hideaway If his cell phone, keys, wallet and other items clutter up the kitchen counter, provide him with an attractive basket to contain his stuff, says Donna Smallin, author of *Organizing Plain & Simple*. Or give him his own shelf in the kitchen or family room with a few small bins so he can put items back in the same place every time.

Store it where you use it Stash a set of toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss in the downstairs bathroom, where everyone can polish his pearly whites before heading out in the morning. Sunscreen and insect spray can be stored near your family's regular exit door so they're easy to remember. Less running up and down stairs equals less chance of last-minute clutter.

make it fun

Well, as fun as cleaning can be. If you're going to spend an hour or

two a week keeping your home tidy, find ways to enjoy the work and make it go faster.

Dance away the dust Turn on your favorite music (loud, so you can hear it over the vacuum!) as you clean. You'll find yourself moving more quickly, getting a good workout to boot.

Make it scent-sational With so many aromatherapy-type cleaning products now available, you're sure to find one that pleases both your nose and your pocketbook. Add vacuum beads or essential oils to the bag, and you'll leave a lovely aroma throughout your home as you whisk away the dirt.

Think therapeutically Consider your cleaning time "productive downtime." The repetitive motions of housecleaning are incredibly calming; they give your brain a chance to relax and come up with creative new ideas. Who knows what you might see more clearly while you're shining those windows? **wd**

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