



SPRING CLEANING SIMPLIFIED

Spring cleaning often is more talked about than practiced. Why? A massive cleaning overhaul can seem overwhelming. But undertaking the annual home shape-up will be less daunting if you keep these tips in mind.

Start with 'Why.' Keep in mind the main purpose of spring cleaning: to eliminate dust and gunk left behind by winter. That will help you focus on what needs to be deep cleaned and leave lighter cleaning for another day.

Declutter. Get "stuff" out of your way (see Page Two).

Get organized. Put all of your tools and supplies in a bucket or caddy so you can move easily from room to room. Use multi-function cleaners and tools, skipping overly specific products and gadgets.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Eliminate clutter, eliminate stress
- 3 How benefits get chosen
- 4 Harvest of the Month: Bell peppers

Work the plan. Have a plan that attacks each room one at a time, and work from one end of the house to the other.

Go high. Start high, quickly dusting ceilings, light fixtures, ceiling fans, walls, corners and so forth.

Beat dust. Curtains, blinds, window shades, couch cushions and pillows trap a lot of dust. Wipe, wash, beat and air them out and the rest of the house will benefit.

Scrub. There's no way around it: Some aspects of spring cleaning come down to scrubbing. But if you follow the tips above, even that part of the routine won't seem so bad ... and the result will be well worth it.

Smart Facts

69%

of people participate in spring cleaning every year.

27%

of people admit that they are the reason their homes are messy.

40%

of Americans don't spring clean because "my home doesn't look dirty."



LESS CLUTTER, BETTER LIFE

While decluttered living has evolved into something like a social movement, there's more to it than fad and fashion. Decluttering your household has been shown to deliver real benefits, ranging from a more efficient household to higher self-esteem, better relationships and improved health and well-being.

The challenge, of course, is how to achieve a truly decluttered state. As Becoming Minimalist website author Joshua Becker puts it, "There is a beautiful world of freedom and fresh breath hiding behind that clutter. Deciding how to declutter your home is up to you."

Here we offer 10 steps to help you get started.

1. **Be your guest.** We often don't see the clutter in our own homes. Step back and try to see your home through the eyes of a guest, and pull aside anything that might seem like clutter.
2. **Start small.** Don't try to tackle everything at once. Start with one drawer, one closet or one corner, and work in small bursts of time rather than planning to spend one day decluttering the whole house.
3. **Schedule time, and create a deadline.** Plan your decluttering sessions around deadlines. For example, plan to declutter your dining room in time to have guests over for dinner.
4. **One-year rule.** If you haven't used it or worn it for a year, get rid of it.
5. **De-duplicate.** If you have more than one of it, get rid of it.
6. **Give everything a home.** Sometimes clutter comes from not knowing where to put things. Figure it out, creating a home for everything.
7. **Put it back where it came from.** A lot of clutter is a product of laziness. If you get something out, put it away when you're done with it.
8. **Go digital.** Nothing clutters a home like paper: records, pictures, letters, etc. Digitize everything you can, and then get rid of any originals that aren't necessary.
9. **Three piles.** For the things you no longer need, make three piles: "Trash," "Sell," and "Donate." Distribute things into the piles as quickly as possible, don't second-guess yourself, and then act on the decisions you've made.
10. **De-clutter, don't be perfect.** Don't try to be perfect, just try to be better. And then repeat the process regularly. Eventually, you'll find the process itself to be good for your overall well-being.



"There is a beautiful world of freedom and fresh breath hiding behind that clutter.."

HOW YOUR BENEFITS PLAN COMES TOGETHER

Employees tend to think about all the components of their benefit plans for only a short time each year, when they are asked to enroll. It would be easy to think that's the only time their employers think about it, too, but the fact is, by the time open enrollment rolls around, organizations typically have spent a lot of time on the plan.

To give a sense of how they spend that time, here is an over-simplified overview of the process employers use to choose a benefits package.

Strike a balance. At its more basic level, the process starts with striking a key balance: Give employees a solid benefits package at a cost that is manageable for both the employer and employee. For that aspect, the employer considers such matters as whether it wants to be known as a company with great benefits, whether it is focused on retaining the current workforce or attracting new workers, and how it wants to compare to competitors.

Consider total compensation. Savvy employers will put the benefits discussion into the context of total compensation, considering all the factors that contribute to an employee's return on employment.

Set a budget. An employer can only supply to employees the benefits it can afford. Some employers will designate a certain percentage of the total budget for benefits; others will put together a package and then find the money to pay for it. A key factor in this consideration is how much of the total cost the employer will pay, and how much will be passed on to employees.

Work with a broker. Most employers will work with a benefits broker to put together the full benefit options they present to employees, relying on the broker to have the knowledge and relationships needed to get the right benefits at a good price. The broker usually brings several scenarios to the table so the employer can choose the ones that work best for the firm and its employees.

Make the choice. The HR team and leadership will weigh these and other factors to make the choices that best meet their criteria, and then communicate the options to employees so they can, in turn, make their choices.

While the final choice often seems to come down to dollars and cents, most employers spend a lot of time considering intangibles such as how employees will react to change, what they thought of past benefit packages and so on. With all of these steps in mind, that once-a-year process for employees can be an all-year process for the HR team.



Autism Acceptance Month

It might appear to be a subtle change, but for families dealing with autism, it is pretty profound: What formerly was known as Autism Awareness Month is now Autism Acceptance Month, reflecting the increased prevalence and awareness of autism in our communities. After all, more than 5 million young people and adults live on the autism spectrum. It's time we stopped simply acknowledging them and truly accept them. Learn more at www.autismspeaks.org.

HARVEST OF THE MONTH: BELL PEPPERS

The bell pepper suffers from mistaken identity. Its name doesn't reflect what it is so much as what people were looking for when they first found it: Legend has it that Christopher Columbus and Spanish explorers named it a "pepper" because they found it when they were looking for peppercorn bushes.

Native to North and South America and The Caribbean, the bell pepper also is often mistaken for a vegetable. It's actually a fruit, and its vitamin punch backs that up: It provides up to three times the vitamin C that you can get from an orange, and is also rich in other vitamins and minerals.

Suitable for eating raw or cooked, the bell pepper is a versatile and accessible food that can add color and flavor to a wide range of dishes. When selecting bell peppers, look for bright, shiny skin that yields to a little pressure. The stems should be green, and the peppers should seem heavy for their size.



Once you get bell peppers home, you can store them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week, and you'll get the best storage results if you put a damp paper towel in the vegetable compartment to help the pepper retain its water.



Recipe: Mediterranean Stuffed Peppers

Ingredients (6 servings):

- 1 cup quinoa
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 medium shallots (1 cup chopped)
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- ¾ cup chopped pistachios
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice plus zest from ½ lemon
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ cup feta cheese crumbles (optional)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425°F. Wash the peppers and cut them in half lengthwise; remove the stems and seeds. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, then place the peppers on top, cut side down. Bake for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven, flip to cut side up, and sprinkle with a pinch of salt and pepper. Bake another 15 minutes until tender. Meanwhile, cook quinoa: Rinse and drain it completely, then place it in a saucepan with 2 cups water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer with the water just bubbling for 17 to 20 minutes, until water has been completely absorbed. Turn off the heat and let sit with the lid on to steam for at least 5 minutes. Mince garlic, shallot and parsley, and chop pistachios. In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil, add garlic, shallot and red pepper flakes to sauté 1 to 2 minutes, until the shallot is translucent and the garlic is fragrant. Remove from the heat, then stir in the cooked quinoa, pistachios, ¼ cup parsley, paprika, oregano, lemon juice and zest, sea salt and black pepper (add more salt to taste). Spoon the filling into the roasted pepper halves. Garnish with a small sprinkling of remaining parsley and feta cheese crumbles.

Nutrition Information:

CALORIES: 281; PROTEIN: 8.9; CARBOHYDRATES: 32.5G; FAT: 13.9; FIBER: 6.9G; SUGARS: 6.9G; VITAMIN C: 157.1MG

Sources: Accessed March 8, 2022

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