

Clean and organize your home without spending a fortune

by Denise Schipani



# the practical housekeeper

**J**UST TAKE A SPIN DOWN the cleaning aisle at the supermarket, and you'll realize the cruel reality of housekeeping: Getting your home clean and organized can cost *a lot* of money. There has to be a better way. So we asked housekeeping experts for their best money-saving tips to help you maintain your standards without breaking the bank.

**Pare down the potions** Buy strategically, thinking double and even triple duty, says Julie Edelman, author of *The Ultimate Accidental Housewife: Your Guide to a Clean-Enough House*. "Regular glass cleaner is my favorite; you can use it instead of separate products for windows, counters and other surfaces." If you can, buy in bulk and decant into smaller reusable containers to store in your kitchen and bathroom cabinets.

**Concentrate!** Check out concentrated cleaners, which you dilute with water, says Sloan Barnett, author of *Green Goes with Everything: Simple Steps to a Healthier Life and a Cleaner Planet*. "They use less packaging, which saves resources, and because they're concentrated, one bottle lasts longer, so it's less expensive."

**Take stock** Before you hit the cleaning aisle, get reacquainted with what's under your sinks. Pull out everything: Do you have two opened bottles of wood floor cleaner? Three kinds of carpet spot remover? It's easy to buy new stuff when you're not sure what you already have, says Edelman.

**Don't treat the cleaning aisle like Baskin-Robbins** There may be more than 31 ways to clean a toilet, but don't waste your money on every one. "What gets expensive is trying all those disposable wipes, mops and toilet brush thingies," says *(Please turn to 86)*

## THE PRACTICAL HOUSEKEEPER

CONTINUED Carolyn Erickson, a former housecleaner and contributing writer to The Housekeeping Channel (*housekeepingchannel.com*), sticks to a few basics like your toilet brush and some cleanser.

**Maintain what you own** Instead of relegating your old vacuum cleaner to the junk heap, get it cleaned and serviced once a year to keep it humming, says Erickson.

**Avoid throwaways** Use microfiber cloths rather than paper towels; dustrags (old T-shirts, for example) instead of disposable dustcloths; and an old-fashioned mop (with a removable, machine-washable head) rather than a mopping "system."

**Clean as you go** The tidier you keep things, the less often you'll have to do a big scrub, says Edelman, so you'll use cleansers less frequently. When soaping up kids in the tub, use a non-oily bubble bath or shampoo, and swish out the tub afterward. Rinse well, and keep a microfiber cloth on hand to shine the faucets and quickly wipe down the edges (where soap spills collect).

**Pause before washing** Often, "dirty" clothes just need airing (or a spritz with a fabric freshener), says Alicia Rockmore, organization expert and coauthor of *Everything (Almost) in Its Place*. No need to fill a washer with once-worn jeans.

**Fold like the Gap** Seriously! Folding shirts and sweaters neatly keeps clothes in good shape and wrinkle-free, so they'll last longer without needing to be replaced. Tops thrown all over are more likely to be tossed in the wash because you're not sure what's clean, says Rockmore.

**Share the big stuff** You want to keep your carpets shampooed, wood floors polished and a tall ladder in the garage, but do you really need to buy all these heavy-duty items? Instead of shelling out a lot of cash, get together with neighbors and share them.

**Wash smart** Using your dishwasher? Forgo the rinse-hold cycle (it uses 3 to 7 gallons of hot water!) and the heated drying cycle—both use a ton of energy. And dishes will still sparkle if you use half the recommended amount of detergent.

**Schedule tasks to save** If you have several loads of laundry to do, tackle as many as you can in one day; your dryer uses less energy when it runs consecutive loads. Same goes for ironing: Better to iron a week's worth of shirts in one go.



## DIY to save

Plumbing's gone frizzy? Bathroom in need of refreshing? If you think your only choices are to duke out cash, think again. Lou Manfredini, Ace's Helpful Hardware Man, explains a few surprisingly simple fixes you can tackle yourself.

### toilet won't flush?

Could be the fault of clogged holes under the rim, which block enough water from coming through. Use a pipe cleaner and some calcium cleanser (such as Lime-A-Way or CLR) and you should be good to, uh, go.

### door stuck?

Find the hinge closest to where the door's sticking to the door jamb, remove one of the screws that's there and install a 3-inch wood screw into the hinge. Tighten the screw, and you'll re-pitch the door.

### tub or shower caulk looking dingy?

It's not too hard or scary to replace. Scrape out the old caulk, clean well with cleanser and let dry overnight. Stretch blue painter's tape along the rim of the tub and the walls, leaving a 1/8-inch gap between. Apply a thin bead of bathroom caulk (ask at the hardware store for the right kind), and smooth with your finger. Remove tape and let dry for 24 hours.

### hole in the wall?

Go to the hardware store and get a metal self-stick patch, lightweight joint compound and a taping knife. Cover the hole with the metal patch, and use the knife to apply a thin coat of joint compound. Let dry, then apply another coat, in a wider circumference. Let dry, then apply a third coat. When that's dry, lightly sand, prime and repaint to match the wall.

## must-have multitaskers

Save time and money with these favorites of The Ultimate Accidental Housewife, Julie Ldelman:

- ▶ **GLASS CLEANER** or another all-purpose surface cleaner. The emphasis: *all-purpose*. Easier and cheaper than a cabinet full of sprays and spritzes.
- ▶ **MULTIPURPOSE DISINFECTING WIPES** OK, these aren't exactly eco-friendly since they're use-and-toss, but if you put a premium on your valuable time and sanity, a tub of these stashed in the kitchen and bath make quick work of in-between cleanings.
- ▶ **MICROFIBER CLOTHS** The major miracle of today's housekeeping: they're absorbent, dust-attracting, non-fibry, work whether wet or dry, and, above all, are machine-washable.
- ▶ **MR. CLEAN MAGIC ERASER** (or similar). Inexpensive, long-lasting and gets rid of scuffs, errant crayon marks, and other "where did that come from?" smudges.
- ▶ **MILD DISHWASHING LIQUID** Secret: You don't necessarily have to use a special cleanser for many things. A squirt of dish liquid and water on a microfiber cloth, and you can clean counters, refrigerator shelves, racks, and on and on.

## SAVE BY ORGANIZING

It may not seem intuitive, but organizing your stuff can save you money. "If you know where everything is, you don't have to go out and buy duplicates," says Tava Smiley, host of TLC's *Clean Sweep*.

**repurpose/recycle** Don't toss shoeboxes: Use them in children's dresser drawers to help them organize socks and undies. Boxes from mail-order stuff (especially the small ones from photo sites or book retailers) are good for craft supplies and small toys. And empty baby food jars are great for holding spices.

**get good hangers** Wood hangers are best to keep your clothing in good shape so it looks better and lasts longer.

**sort it** Go through your closet, pulling out items you don't use, and either sell them or give them to charity. While you're at it, put aside classic clothing pieces that are simply a decade or so out of date. "Shortening the hem of a dress, removing the shoulder pads and tailoring a jacket are easy ways to refresh clothing," says Smiley.

**mine cash from your kitchen** Check cabinets for appliances that aren't being used. If you can't remember the last time you made smoothies, then maybe you don't need that blender after all. Selling smaller kitchen appliances can add up (try free classified sites like Kijiji.com or Craigslist.org).

**update your pantry** Take stock of what you have. (Old cans of chicken stock or creamed corn? Check the date and toss what's no longer good. Use inexpensive risers to organize items.) Even consider putting a dry-erase board on the inside door to list what you've got and what you're low on. **wd**



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