

Fresh year, fresh start

As a new year approaches, it's time to get our homes and our lives in order. To inspire you and get you off to an organized start, we present our occasional list of chores, tasks and things to do.

Versions of this list published in 1996, 1998 and 2000 were among the most popular features ever to appear in this section. Today we offer an updated list of more than 100 finite, doable ideas. Some will take a matter of minutes, and you can feel good about crossing them off. Others are projects to work away at during the year.



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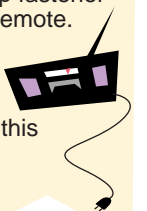
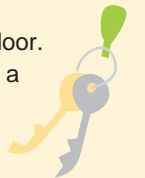
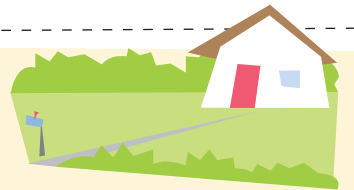
In the kitchen

- Clean the plant shelves, tops of cabinets and knickknack shelves around the sink.
- Clean the top of the refrigerator.
- Clean out the refrigerator and freezer. If something doesn't look good enough to eat, or you can't identify it, out it goes.
- Go through your pantry and get rid of the canned goods you'll never eat. Donate them to a food bank.
- Take a good look at your spice rack and get rid of the items you never use, or those that have been around for years. They've lost their punch. Replenish items you're low on.
- Survey your pots and pans. Are there items you seldom or never use? If the turkey roaster made its twice-a-year appearance at Thanksgiving and Christmas, you can retire it to an out-of-the-way place until next November. If you never use the second soup kettle, or the pastamaker, give it away.
- Inventory your storage ware. Get rid of topless bottoms and bottomless tops. If there's a particular piece or size that would make your work easier, get it.
- Replenish your holiday-depleted supply of zip-top plastic bags, plastic wrap and aluminum foil.
- Investigate the area under the sink. Consider moving infrequently used cleaning products to a remote location to free up space.
- Create a master grocery list that corresponds to the layout of the grocery store where you shop. List the items you typically buy. Make copies and use them throughout the year to plan your shopping trips and save time.
- Throw out every chipped or cracked mug.
- Clean your cutting board with a solution of bleach and water.
- Sharpen the knives.
- Review the holiday entertaining you've done. Are there serving pieces, cookware, barware or utensils that would have made things easier? Get them.
- Take a hard look at your supply of dishes and glassware. If you routinely cook for only two or four people, store the rest of your service for 12 in a remote location, freeing up cabinet space for items you need every day.
- Buy a roll of masking tape and a marking pen to label freezer bags and refrigerator storage containers.
- Clean the fronts of your kitchen cabinets.
- Lift up the range top and clean underneath; clean the range top and burner bowls.
- Greasy buildup around the range's exhaust vent? Clean it.



All around the house

- Oil the squeaky hinges.
- Clean your ceiling light fixtures: Dust off the cobwebs, clean glass shades and reassemble.
- Dust the fan blades.
- Polish the silver. If it's a burden rather than a blessing, it's okay to sell it or give it away.
- Frame and hang the artwork you've been gathering.
- Take down the art that has been hanging in the same place for years. You've stopped seeing it. Move it elsewhere in the house or store it; buy a new piece or two.
- Put the kids' annual school photos in a scrapbook or album. The only one you need to have out is the current one.
- Attack your entryway with a broom and hose. Clear away the spiderwebs, dead insects, dried leaves.
- Polish the doorknob. Wash the windows in the front door.
- Replace or repair the doorbell that won't ring.
- Move the lamps around. Swap the chandelier in one room for the ceiling fixture in another. Replace the lampshades.
- Visit the light bulb department at a home center or store that specializes in light bulbs. Learn about new kinds of bulbs and replace the old with the new: halogen, energy-efficient, self-dimming, motion-sensitive, etc.
- Buy doubles or triples of items that you use frequently or that always seem to be at the other end of the house: another screwdriver, another set of measuring spoons, another pair of scissors.
- Clean the phone.
- Walk around the house with a rag and a spray bottle of cleaner and wipe away the fingerprints around switch plates and on the doors and door frames. If you have pets, check the doors at animal level for streaks and dirt.
- Clean the porch lamps or the lights by the front door.
- Spot-clean the rugs, or, if they're that bad, call in a professional.
- Throw out keys whose locks you cannot identify.
- Have that needed spare key made.
- Give the front of the house a fresh look with stylish new house numerals or a yard sign with your house number. If you don't have numbers on the front and back of your house, add them.
- Move the heavy furniture and appliances (refrigerator, dressers, beds) and vacuum or mop behind them.
- Come to grips with an irritating daily problem. If another laundry basket or another phone or a coat hook or a shelf in a certain location or 10 minutes' work with sandpaper, WD-40 or a screwdriver would make life easier, do it.
- Wash the windows.
- Check the family's shoes. Take to the shoemaker those that need repair; polish the others; replace shoelaces.
- Sew on the button, mend the tear, fix the hem – or get rid of the item.
- What needs rethinking so it works better? If you've ended your love affair with romance novels, move them off that prominent shelf to make way for the books you're reading now. If you've taken up a new hobby, clear a work space, rearrange lighting or create storage.
- When friends stop by, what are you always short of, or what don't you have? Cocktail napkins, beer glasses, coasters, a decent ice bucket, a pizza cutter, serving platters? Treat yourself to what you need.
- Buy a new doormat.
- Throw out expired coupons and those for products you'll never buy.
- Buy an over-the-door rack or a basket where the family's hats and caps can be deposited.
- Learn a new skill: how to change a tire, hang a picture, fix a leaky faucet, a running toilet or a backed-up drain, use a power drill/driver for simple home repairs. If your spouse is the one who usually handles these chores, don't be helpless when he or she isn't around.
- Don't hesitate to hire help to tackle major chores: a cleaning service, someone to help haul away trash, painters who will get the job done quickly.
- Where's the remote? Apply a strip of hook-and-loop fastener to the side of the television set, the other side to the remote. Then stick 'em together.
- Clean the stereo unit. Take out the electronics, spray with electronic cleaner, replace, then label the cords with masking tape or special tags designed for this purpose.



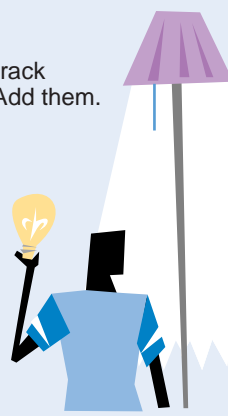
In the garden

- Repot, fertilize and trim back the houseplants.
- Give away or throw away plants that need more care than you can offer.
- Transplant the houseplants into the yard.
- Take notice of the trees on your property. Do they need significant pruning, especially limbs that arch over your roof or your neighbor's? Would the trees look better if lower branches were trimmed? It may be time to plant trees. You can refer to them henceforth as "the 2004 crop."
- Walk the fence lines. Do your fences need painting or repair? Have the corners of your yard where you never go become overgrown or crowded with stuff?
- Give your home an exterior makeover. Hire a landscaper to offer designs on perking up the place.



Bed and bath

- Go through the linen closet. Throw out or give away what's worn and frayed. Make a list of what you need and watch for January white sales. (You are allowed to buy sheets more often than once every 20 years.)
- Reorganize the linen closet: Set aside one shelf or area for each size of sheet so you're not constantly unfolding and refolding to figure out which is the single and which the king size.
- When was the last time you replaced the bed pillows? Are they soiled, crushed, lumpy or limp? The industry recommends replacing them every two to three years. If yours are overdue, plan to buy one or two new ones each month until every bed in the house has new pillows.
- Turn the mattresses periodically.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet. Get rid of old or unused medicines. (Flush them down the toilet so a pet or child can't fish them out of the wastebasket.)
- Buy a new shower curtain.
- Would a brighter light or a magazine rack make your bathroom more functional? Add them.
- Bath mat looking faded and frowsy? Time for a new one.
- Scrub the soap scum from the shower and soap dishes.
- Organize bathroom cleaning supplies in plastic baskets or dishpans under the sink. Replace what's needed; get rid of what you don't use.



To learn more, please see 5F



Taming the clutter



Safe and secure



In pet world

Behind the wheel



Family business

