



# Signs of Spring [Cleaning]

*The scoop on keeping your home sparkling and 'fix-it' free*

A hhhh. Don't you just love the feeling you get after spending the afternoon, day or weekend cleaning out clutter from closets, basement, attic or other areas clutter seems to gravitate? I am experiencing that feeling at this very moment. Never mind that I have been procrastinating about it for weeks! We household CEO's usually start itching to get rid of the seasonal clutter right about now—early spring. The holidays are gone, the little spring flowers are about to pop, and it is time to think about everything that needs seasonal cleaning, fixing or just annual maintenance.

I've written before about getting your home organized—and bringing in professionals to manage the process if need be (see my website [DevonFleming.com](http://DevonFleming.com) for those resources). But this month I'm getting down and dirty, focusing, if you will, on the nitty gritty. Having just completed a major cleaning binge, I realize there are a lot of questions I don't have answers for—like why do I own dozens of cleaning solutions, each for a specific need surface such as windows, wood, tile, countertop, sinks, stainless steel, electronics cleanser? (phew!) What happened in the old days when soap and vinegar did the trick? Do they still? Plus, there's all the confusion about chemicals we hear in the media. I am an acknowledged anti-bacterial freak, but I also try to avoid damaging chemicals. Even more, my cleaning binge has unearthed a num-



ber of little fix-it jobs—like a wobbly door knob and a temperamental light fixture in the kids' room—which, though

seemingly small, could quite conceivably take me and the hubby all day to attempt, let alone get right. What's a household CEO to do?

### Call in the experts

I have people email me all the time looking for qualified cleaning crews and household help. In the same breath, these folks tell me “no one knows how to clean these days” and “it's so hard to find someone to take care of the little jobs.” What I've found is that most people have their own cleaning “rules and standards”. I know cleaning is a very personal experience! And while I am not sure that there is any right way to clean, there are certainly, I know, many wrong ways. I'll spare you the details.

My first consult was on cleaning with Joe Malizia, owner of ServiceMaster of Darien. It's an excellent resource for big and smaller jobs alike. Joe is truly a 'Clean Freak' – isn't that what you want in the owner of a cleaning company? When we spoke, I asked him about his cleaning habits. “Donald Trump once said that you can tell a lot about someone's cleaning habits by the state of their car,” Joe said. “My car is impeccable as is my home. Everything has a place and is kept clean.” Joe made a great point.

This spoke to me. I struggle to keep my



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## From the *Pink Book*

Farmhouse—home to my three kids, three dogs and busy husband, clean and tidy. It says that the most important part of keeping clean and clutter free—stuff has to have a home and always be kept there. Once everything is in its place, you can focus on the cleaning part! Joe also said he's employing a lot of "green" techniques that reduce the need for chemicals in cleaning projects. Woo-hoo!

I asked Joe what is the most common mistake people make with their Spring Cleaning tasks. He said the number one biggest mistake people makes is to try and do it all at once.

### Joe's **Basics** on Cleaning

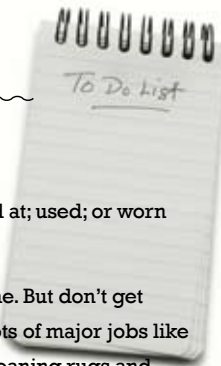
**Get organized first**—things that are not looked at; used; or worn should be given away, sold, or tossed.

**Then make a list** of all that you want to get done. But don't get discouraged. The list is bound to be long with lots of major jobs like cleaning windows, power washing the house, cleaning rugs and furniture and so on. Some areas that are commonly overlooked are behind and under furniture (furniture should be moved); baseboards, moldings and other woodwork; windows; steam cleaning carpets, cleaning upholstered furniture and damp-mopping the dust vacuuming leaves behind.

**After the list is complete**, pick what you and the family can do. Tackle one room at a time and complete it before moving on to the next. Take all the time you need so tasks are fully completed even if it takes more than one or two days. Then, the maintenance will be a simple matter of staying on top of things (not making new piles).

**Know what you cannot do** and then hire a professional. By doing a walk thru estimate, we can set up a schedule for someone based on affordability, time, and to do exactly as that person so desires. One thing to remember when hiring an outside source is to always get an estimate/contract in writing. It's your right as a customer to know what the cost is and what's going to be done. And it gives you an outline of what you are to expect from that company. With a written estimate a client is in control of the job. And that's what people want today.

**Maintenance**—it's a must, especially when dealing with major jobs like having your floors refinished which requires you to move out furniture, upset the whole house for a week, and have tons of dust cleaned up. Find out from your hired professional the best maintenance schedule so you don't have to do the whole job again in a few short years.



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**Skip's Annual Maintenance Tips**

- The most important maintenance projects often overlooked by many homeowners concern prevention of water intrusion. For most homes, water is public enemy number one. The number one source of major exterior damage is water seeping into window sills, corner boards, etc. over long periods of time, resulting in wood rot or mold. The best way to avoid this kind of damage is to simply keep your gutters clean on a once or twice a year schedule. And even better way to keep your gutters clear of debris is to install a polyether foam insert, which will eliminate the need to ever clean the gutters again.
- Routinely check and repair the caulking and weather stripping around windows and doors—this will help with water as well as heating or cooling loss. etc.
- Apply sealants to decks, porches, and verandas routinely to keep them looking best and preventing damage.
- In the early spring it's wise to inspect outside faucet lines for potential freezing to avoid leaks and subsequent interior water damage.
- Screens on windows, doors, porches, etc. also need to be inspected and repaired in order to prevent insects from entering the home.
- Early spring is also a good time to power wash exteriors, and it is especially important to power wash wooden decks and regularly apply sealant that contains a UV blocker.
- Visit my website [www.mrhandymanct.com](http://www.mrhandymanct.com) for more suggestions on ways to increase the comfort and value of your home.

In addition to the cleaning help, taking care of the little problems around the house often prevents big, costly problems in the future. How do you know when a problem is at hand—like many things in life, by the time you're asking if it's a problem, it probably is one.



I called on Skip Wyatt, a great guy and owner of Mr. HandymanCT, for some things to look for or think about annual to keep the house in good shape. See sidebar (this page) for some of his tips.

Thanks for Joe and Skip, my home is on track to be ship shape and sparkling this spring. I hope you can use some of this expert advice in your home, too.

Happy Cleaning!

*Devon Fleming's Third Edition of The Pink Book: The Hottest Guide to Living in Fairfield County is being released in May. Devon is considered lower Connecticut's Home and Lifestyle expert and her multi media business provides 'Solutions for the Modern Household Manager'. Visit [DevonFleming.com](http://DevonFleming.com) for more info*

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