

How to Love the Home you Have

This month's tips are quick fixes on making your "nest" more comfortable, cozy, and efficient. A smooth running, clean and clutter free home makes you fall in love again. With all the cold weather, February is a challenging month with most of us spending more time indoors. Take advantage of the time inside to de-clutter, clean more effectively and give your house a checkup. You'll love the results!

- **Dust cloths - out with the old!** If you are still using a feather duster or an old T-shirt, consider changing to a microfiber cloth. The little loops trap more dust and come in various shapes for hard to clean areas like blinds and ceiling fans. Damp microfiber cloths are even better.
- **Dust or vacuum first?** My mother always insisted it was better to dust first, from the highest point to the lowest and then vacuum last to pick up any particles that you disturbed. The answer to this one lies with your vacuum cleaner. Newer HEPA filter model spew out less dust laden air, so dust first.
- **Cut down on dust.** Replace heating and air filters monthly to reduce the amount of dust in the air. Pleated filters will be more efficient. Empty vacuum filters outdoors to prevent re-introducing the dust you just picked up.
- **Reduce dust catchers.** OK, last one on dusting. Removing textiles can reduce dust collection. Replacing drapes and curtains with blinds eliminates yards of dust collecting fabric. Hardwood floors trap less dust than carpets. If you must have some soft surfaces, consider shorter pile carpet or scatter rugs. Hard surface furniture such as leather, plastic, and wood harbor less dust than fabric upholstery.
- **De-clutter and streamline.** Take advantage of organizational systems that are often on sale at the beginning of the year to maximize your storage. Scan and toss old paper records. [Suzy Orman](#) suggests 3 years for tax returns and supporting documents. Toss bank receipts after a month. Keep documents like insurance policies, stocks and retirement plans while they are active. Life time documents include certificate of birth, marriage, divorce and citizenship.
- **Test Detectors.** If you can't remember when you last tested your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, check them now. Homes are closed up more in the winter and fumes can build up faster from gas heat and even fireplaces. Replace batteries with longer life span batteries. New detectors come with 10 year batteries.
- **Check your Fire Extinguishers.** Learn from a leader in fire safety products, Walter Kidde, headquartered in Mebane, NC. Visit their website www.kidde.com/, filled with fire safety and product information.
- **Test and Replace GFCI Receptacle.** You probably haven't given these devices much thought since your home inspection report. They do wear out over time. You can recognize them easily by the outlets with the black and red buttons on them – hit the test button and see if it resets your circuit.
- **Pruning time.** If you must get outside and it is not freezing, February is an ideal time to trim trees except maples and birches. See [Southern Living's](#) pruning how to guide.
- **Bring springtime color indoors.** If you have quince, forsythia or star magnolias in your yard, selectively clip some branches to bring indoors and within a week you'll see spring colors in your vases.