

HOW TO

Clean When Your Home is For Sale

Executing a deep clean before putting your home on the market will not only help it shine, but it will make tidiness easier to maintain between showings. Here are some power-cleaning tips to try.

Clean windows make a huge difference — Remove window screens and place them outside on a tarp or other clean, waterproof surface. Use a garden hose, an all-purpose cleaner, and a soft brush to gently clean the screens. You don't need anything special to polish up window glass; just mix a solution of one part white vinegar to eight parts water, plus a drop or two of dishwashing liquid in a spray bottle. Wipe with newspaper to avoid streaks. (Washing on a cloudy day also reduces streaking.)

The fridge is the most common source of kitchen smells— Check the drip tray underneath your refrigerator and wash out any standing water from defrosting. Scrub the inside of the fridge with a baking soda and water solution. Activated charcoal in the fridge can help keep odors at bay.

Think outside the house — It's amazing the difference a sparkling entryway makes to your home's curb appeal. Wipe down your front door, give the doormat a good shake/vacuum, and make sure dust and dirt haven't collected on outdoor furniture. Use a pressure washer to give your driveway and garage floor a good cleaning. The acidity in dark cola drinks can help remove oil, rust, and grease stains, along with a little elbow grease.

Target the Bathroom — For tile floors, apply your usual cleaner and then run a wet/dry vac, which will suck contaminants out of the grout. Pour a quarter cup each of baking soda and vinegar down the drains, leaving the concoction overnight, then flush with boiling water. Clean soap scum and mildew from plastic shower curtains by tossing them into your washer on the gentle cycle in cold water, with detergent and ½ cup vinegar (if mildew is present, add ½ cup of bleach instead of vinegar). Put a couple of large towels into the machine to act as scrubbers. Allow the curtain to drip-dry on the rod.

Make your bed better — Vacuum mattresses and box springs, and then rotate and flip over. Do the same for removable furniture cushions. This is also a great time to wash or dry-clean the dust ruffle and mattress pad. Add new loft to a lumpy comforter by having two people vigorously shake the quilt up and down to redistribute stuffing.

Wash the walls. — Grease, smoke, and dust can adhere to walls and make even the best decorating look dingy. Resist the temptation to spot-clean since it will make the rest of the wall look dirtier. Mop walls using a general-purpose cleaner diluted with hot water. Start at the top corner of the wall to avoid drips. Don't press too hard, and rinse the mop head frequently in clean water. Use melamine foam cleaner to erase scuffs and stains.

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