

How to Clean Your House

201 Great House Cleaning Ideas and Tips For Busy Moms

By Judith Brown

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1. General Cleaning Ideas

The acid in vinegar makes it a good preventive wash for areas where mildew might form.

To remove discoloration from a yellowed bathtub, rub the tub with a solution of salt and turpentine.

So that you don't have to guess when trying to mix correct solutions of cleaning compounds, use red fingernail polish to plainly mark pint, quart, and gallon levels inside a bucket.

Dust and other debris often collect in hard to-reach corners, such as behind large appliances, but you can reach easily into these corners with a yardstick. Make a "yardstick" duster" by covering the end with a sock, secured with rubber bands, or by fastening a small sponge to the end of the yardstick with staples or rubber bands.

You can eliminate tiny scratches on glass by polishing the affected areas with toothpaste.

A portable blow dryer can soften wax that has dripped onto wooden surfaces. Wipe away the wax with a paper towel, then rinse the area with a mixture of vinegar and water. Dry thoroughly.

You can get stale odors out of sponges by washing them in the dishwasher, or by soaking them overnight in a bowl of bleach and rinsing them well the next morning.

Make an efficient cleaning apron from a compartmented shoe bag by attaching strings and filling the pockets with rags, polishes, brushes, and other lightweight supplies.

Old toothbrushes can be put to good use as hair dye applicators, or as cleaning brushes for silverware, combs, and typewriter keys.

To clean your radiators, hang a damp cloth behind the radiator, then blow on the radiator with a hair dryer to force hidden dirt and dust onto the damp cloth.

An automobile snow brush is perfect for cleaning under a refrigerator.

If you're tired of buying new dust mops because the old ones get dirty so quickly, cover your mop with an old nylon stocking. When the stocking gets soiled, simply discard it and replace it with another.

When a spray bottle's suction tube doesn't reach the liquid because most of the liquid has been used up, drop marbles or pebbles into the bottle until the level of the liquid rises enough to cover the end of the tube.

Dusting

Want to dust furniture quick as a flash? Dampen two old cotton gloves or socks with furniture polish, slip them over your hands and then dust with both hands.

Worn-out cotton sweat socks-particularly those with terry-lined feet-make excellent dusting mitts.

Instead of buying dust cloths chemically treated to "attract" dust, make your own from cheesecloth. Dip the cloth in a solution of 2 cups of water and 1/4 cup of lemon oil and allow it to dry before using.

Paint brushes make excellent dusters for small or hard-to-reach areas. Flick them along door jambs, around windows, and into corners where dust cloths won't fit.

To avoid snagging or harming delicate fabric when dusting ruffled or pleated lamp shades, use an old shaving brush or a baby's hair brush. The bristles are soft and effective.

Vacuuming

You can use a straightened wire hanger to unclog a jammed vacuum cleaner hose. Leave a small hook at the end of the hanger and maneuver it back and forth; then, see if the hose is free of debris by dropping a coin through it. If the coin rolls out the other end, you're ready to vacuum again. If it doesn't, you'll have to maneuver the hanger some more. Another way to unclog a vacuum cleaner hose is to push an ordinary garden hose through it.

It's annoying to discover that the vacuum cord doesn't extend as far as you need it to. Rather than have to look for other wall sockets (usually located behind furniture), just add an extension to your cleaner's present cord.

To prevent a dust cloud from forming, empty a vacuum cleaner bag into a large plastic garbage bag; hold the mouth of the bag shut as you dump the dust inside it.

It's best to empty vacuum cleaner bags when they're about two-thirds full; a full bag reduces suction power.

Mend a torn reusable vacuum cleaner bag by pressing iron-on patches over the tears.

You can vacuum dust and lint from mops and brooms by holding them under the hose attachment.

Furniture

Leftover tea makes a good cleaning agent for varnished furniture.

While waxing furniture, also wax the insides of ash trays. This makes them easier to clean.

Rub walnut or pecan meat over scratches in finished wood; the oil often hides them. Liquid shoe polish often covers scratches, too.

Wear cotton gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints while polishing furniture.

After polishing furniture, sprinkle on a little cornstarch and rub to a high gloss. Cornstarch absorbs oil and leaves a glistening, fingerprint-free surface.

Paste furniture wax or oil furniture polish will camouflage tiny furniture scratches.

To treat scratches on natural wood or antique finishes, polish with a mixture of equal amounts of turpentine and boiled linseed oil.

Apply with a clean, soft, damp cloth. Any scratch made by a match can be removed by rubbing it with a lemon wedge.

Pictures

When cleaning picture glass, carefully dust the glass, and then polish it with tissues sold for cleaning eyeglasses. Avoid liquid cleaners because they could seep under the edge of the glass and

spoil the photo or artwork. If you do use liquid cleaners, apply them to a cloth, never directly to the glass.

To make a tarnished gilt frame gleam again, wipe it with a rag dampened with turpentine.

To avoid damaging a picture or painting when polishing its wooden frame, spray the polish on a cloth, not on the frame, and then carefully apply to the frame.

To clean deeply carved picture frames, use a clean, dry, plastic squeeze bottle, pumping the bottle like a small bellows to blow dust from tiny crevices.

Luggage

Do you have black scuff marks on your luggage? They'll rub off with lemon extract.

Clean colored leather luggage with mild soapsuds and a damp sponge or soft-nap cloth.

The best way to clean regular leather luggage is to use a soft, clean rag to rub in a few drops of baby shampoo, a small area at a time. Repeat until all surfaces are covered. Use the same cloth to buff the luggage to a natural sheen.

Books and Records

To keep vinyl and imitation leather-covered books looking good as new, wash them periodically with a mild detergent and then treat with a light coat of petroleum jelly or a vinyl dressing.

It is easy to clean lightly soiled records on the turntable.

Gently hold a clean dust cloth on a record and allow the disc to turn at least 3 revolutions under the cloth. You'll be cleaning with the grooves, not across them, and so won't damage the record.

Treat leather-bound books periodically with a light oil so that the leather won't dry out and crack.

If you arrange books at the front of shelves, air will be able to circulate and prevent mustiness.

Protect books from direct sunlight, because it can fade the bindings and cause them to deteriorate.

In order to remove grease stains from books rub the affected areas with soft, white bread-crumbs.

Sprinkle damp book pages with talcum powder or cornstarch until the moisture is absorbed, then shake or brush the powder away.

Valuables and Art Objects

To clean tarnished silver, place the items in a glass dish, add a piece of aluminum foil, and cover with a quart of hot water mixed with 1 tablespoon of baking soda. A reaction between the foil and the silver will remove any tarnish. Don't use this process on raised designs, however. You'll lose the dark accents of the sculpture.

An easy way to clean silver is with ordinary baking soda. Make a paste from 3 parts soda to 1 part water. Using a soft cloth, rub the paste gently on the silver surface. Tarnish will disappear rapidly.

After rinsing, buff the silver with a soft cloth to bring up the shine.

To restore luster to a dried-out emerald or jade, dip a toothpick in olive oil and gently rub it over the stone's surface. (Use this method only if the piece won't be resold, since the stone may darken.

An inexpensive way to clean gold is to mix 1 teaspoon of cigarette ash with enough water to form a paste. Rub the paste onto the surface of the gold with a soft cloth, rinse,

and buff dry with a chamois. If no one in the house smokes, use baking soda instead of cigarette ash.

Always keep ivory objects where light can reach them, because steady darkness causes ivory to yellow.

To clean a yellowing ivory object, cut a lemon in half, dip it in salt, and rub it over the ivory surface. When the surface is dry, wipe it with a damp cloth, then buff dry for bright finish.

You can remove stubborn stains from ivory or plastic piano keys with a damp cloth dipped in baking soda, being careful not to let the soda fall between the keys. Wipe the keys off with another cloth, and buff them dry.

Lampshades fixed to their frames with glue should be dry-cleaned.

When lampshades aren't glued to their frames, wash them in the bathtub with warm water and a spray hose. Dry them quickly after washing so the frames won't rust. An electric fan or hair dryer can speed the drying process.

To keep a phone clean and germfree, rub it with an alcohol-soaked paper towel.

To wash fragile objects without breaking them, put them on a tray in the sink and spray them first with window cleaner or foam bathroom cleaner, and then with water. Let them air dry on a towel.

You can wash knickknacks more quickly than you can dust them. Swish them in water containing a touch of liquid detergent, rinse, and drain on a towel. If you want to make sure every crevice is dry, use a hair dryer.

Remove traces of rust on iron by rubbing with an emery cloth, or with steel wool moistened with a few drops of turpentine or kerosene.

It is possible to clean a chandelier without taking it down; here's how. In a glass, mix a solution of 1 part denatured alcohol and 3 parts water.

Cover the floor or table under the chandelier with newspaper or plastic and set up a ladder so that you can reach the fixture's pendants. Individually submerge the crystals in the glass for a few moments, swishing them back and forth a little, and then simply let them air dry.

To get rid of stale cigarette or cigar smoke, leave a dish of vinegar or ammonia in the room overnight. It also helps to dampen a towel with diluted vinegar and wave it through the room.

Clean and sweeten ashtrays by washing them in a solution of 1 tablespoon of baking soda to a quart of water.

If candle wax has dripped on a table or cloth, hold an ice cube against the wax until it's brittle, and then pry it off with a knife or your fingernail.

If silver candlesticks accumulate wax drippings, place them in the freezer; when the wax freezes, you'll be able to peel it off.

To make a copper/brass/bronze cleaner, stir together 1 tablespoon of table salt and 1 tablespoon of flour. Continuing to stir, add 1 tablespoon of white vinegar. Apply the resulting paste with a damp cloth or sponge, rub gently, then rinse and wipe dry.

Sometimes a slightly tarnished aluminum surface can be cleaned by rubbing it with crumpled aluminum foil.

Why pay a chimney sweep to clean your chimney? Do it yourself this way. Open the damper and seal the hearth from the room with scrap lumber or a drop cloth secured with masking tape. If the flue is straight, fill a burlap bag with wadded paper and 2 bricks and then fasten it to a long rope. Go up to the roof and slide the bag up and down the chimney's interior 5 or 6 times to remove all soot. If the flue is curved, use 2 feet of tire chain or other heavy chain at the end of the rope, rather than a burlap bag. Slap the chain against the flue's sides as you raise and lower the rope 5 or 6 times. For the most efficient use of your fireplace, do this once a year.

To see if your chimney is free of soot after you've cleaned it, wait an hour or so for the dust to settle and then use a large hand mirror and a flash-light to examine the flue.

Fireplace smoke stains can be removed by washing them with 1/2 cup of trisodium phosphate (TSP) mixed in 1 gallon of water. (Wear gloves to protect your hands.) You also can remove fireplace smoke stains by rubbing them with an art gum eraser, or by applying a paste of cream of tartar and water; when the paste dries brush it off, along with the stains.

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2. Cleaning and Washing Floors

A mopped floor occasionally dries with a luster-dulling film; if you mop it again with water containing a cup or so of white vinegar the floor will glisten.

A pencil eraser or fine, dry steel wool is often effective in removing scuff marks left by shoe heels on resilient flooring. Lift crayon marks by rubbing them with toothpaste or silver polish on a damp rag.

Instead of using commercial preparations, you can "wax" a floor by washing it with warm water to which you have added 2 tablespoons of furniture polish and 1/2 cup of vinegar.

When cleaning an asphalt tile floor with water, use a well-wrung cloth or sponge; excess water can seep into the seams and loosen the adhesives that hold the flooring.

Rather than wax floors on your hands and knees, stand and use a long-handled paint roller. A roller not only speeds up the waxing process, it makes it easy to reach under a radiator or built-in

furniture.

To clean up raw egg dropped on a floor, sprinkle it with salt, let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes, and then sweep it up with a broom.

Instead of using a rag to apply paste wax to floors, get a better grip and protect your skin with a glove-type potholder or workman's glove slipped over your hand. Such gloves have the added advantage of being sturdy and easy to clean.

When washing highly waxed floors between waxings, use a solution of 1 cup of fabric softener in 1/2 pail of water to prevent dulling the shine.

A few drops of vinegar in the water used to clean the kitchen floor will help remove particles of cooking grease that have settled from the air.

For a fast shine between floor waxings, put a piece of waxed paper under your mop and slide it around your floor.

After you've waxed a floor, wrap a bath towel around each foot and shuffle around the room to polish the floor in a flash.

When it's time for a new coat of wax on a linoleum or tile floor, remove the old wax by mopping with a solution of 3 parts of water to 1 part of rubbing alcohol.

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3. Cleaning Walls and Wall Coverings

There's no need to purchase expensive wall cleaner. You can make your own economical cleaner by mixing into a gallon of warm water 1/4 cup of washing soda, 1/4 cup of white vinegar, and 1/2 cup of ammonia.

Lift crayon marks off a painted wall by rubbing them carefully with a cloth or sponge dampened with mineral spirits or lighter fluid. Remove any shine by sponging lightly with hot water.

To remove crayon marks on wallpaper, rub carefully with a dry soap-filled, fine grade steel-wool pad. Or use a wad of white paper toweling moistened with dry-cleaning solvent and delicately sponge the surface. Carefully blot and lift in small areas to prevent the solvent from spreading and discoloring the paper.

It's best to wash walls from the bottom up; otherwise, water trickling over the dry, unwashed areas creates hard-to-remove streaks.

You can make washing walls less of a wet, messy task by decreasing the amount of water and using an egg beater to make thick suds.

Remove ordinary soil marks from wallpaper by rubbing them gently with an art gum eraser.

It's easy to remove transparent tape from a wall without marring the paint or wallpaper if you press the tape-through a protective cloth-with a warm iron to soften and loosen the tape's adhesive backing.

To prevent water from running down your arm when washing walls, fashion a bracelet from a sponge or washcloth held in place with a thick rubber band.

For cleaning rough-textured walls, old nylon stockings or socks are better than sponges or cloths because they won't tear and leave difficult-to-remove bits and pieces on the surface.

You can sponge washable wall coverings and some vinyls with a mild detergent. To find out how much elbow grease your paper can take, first work on a scrap.

Lift grease stains from washable wallpaper with a paste made of cornstarch and water. Alternatively, rub dry borax over stains.

To remove grease stains from a grass-cloth wall or ceiling covering apply an aerosol dry cleaner. Follow instructions carefully.

To remove a grease spot from non-washable wallpaper, place a blotter over the spot and press it with a moderately hot iron. The blotter will soak up the grease. Repeat as required.

You can also use talcum powder to remove a grease spot on non-washable wallpaper. Dust on the talc with a powder-puff, leave it for an hour and then brush it off. Repeat, if necessary.

Clean non-washable wallpaper with rye bread.

Make a fist-sized wad of bread and rub it across discolorations and dirt.

To remove white water marks from wood wall paneling, rub mayonnaise into them. Wipe off the mayonnaise 12 hours later. The marks will have vanished.

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4. Cleaning Windows

A liquid cleaner for glass can be made by mixing 2 cups of water and 2 tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent with 2 cups of isopropyl rubbing alcohol (70 percent). Stir until thoroughly mixed and then pour into a clean, pump-spray bottle. The alcohol keeps the cleaner from freezing on the panes in cold weather.

Pure vinegar will remove stubborn hard-water sprinkler spots and streaks from a window.

Cloudy days are preferable to sunny days for window washing because direct sunlight dries cleaning solutions before you can polish the glass properly.

If you can wash one side of a window with horizontal strokes and the other side with vertical strokes, you'll be able to tell which side a streak is on.

An old auto wiper blade makes a good squeegee for washing windows.

When washing windows, a soft toothbrush or a cotton swab is a useful tool for cleaning comers.

It is possible to clean upstairs window exteriors without using a ladder. Use a garden hose spray bottle attachment containing automatic dishwasher detergent; the spray leaves only a few spots.

To give an extra shine to window glass, polish it with well-washed cotton T-shirts or old diapers.

Polish windows to a sparkling shine with crumpled-up newspaper. The paper also leaves a film that's resistant to dirt.

Rubbing a clean blackboard eraser over a freshly washed (and dried) window gives it a diamond-bright shine.

To make an ammonia-based glass cleaner, mix 2 cups of water, 1 cup of isopropyl rubbing alcohol (70 percent), and 1 tablespoon of household ammonia. Pour into a clean, pump-spray bottle.

To remove built-up cooking grease or soot from window glass, use a solution of 2 cups of kerosene and 1 gallon of warm water. Rub it on with a soft rag and wipe the panes dry with a clean towel. Caution: Kerosene is flammable; don't pour it or use it near an open flame. The same cleaning solution (2 cups of kerosene to 1 gallon of warm water) also protects window exteriors. Water drops will bead just as they do on a highly waxed car.

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5. Cleaning the Bathroom

Bathroom Tiles

To make your own ceramic tile cleaner, put 1/4 cup of baking soda, 1/2 cup of white vinegar, and 1 cup of household ammonia in a bucket. Add 1 gallon of warm water, stirring until the baking soda dissolves. Wearing rubber gloves, apply the mixture with a scrub brush or sponge and then rinse. Mix a fresh batch for each cleaning.

To make your own heavy-duty grout cleaner, put 3 cups of baking soda in a medium-size bowl and add 1 cup of warm water. Mix the contents to a smooth paste and scrub into grout with a damp sponge or toothbrush, rinsing thoroughly afterwards. Mix a fresh batch for each cleaning.

A typewriter eraser from the stationery store is an excellent tool for cleaning the grout between bathroom tiles.

To make your bathroom walls sparkle, rub the ceramic tile with car wax and buff after 10 minutes.

You can remove most mildew from the grout between tiles by rubbing it with a toothbrush or nailbrush dipped in laundry bleach. (Don't use abrasive powders or steel-wool pads or you'll scratch the tile.) Rinse with clear water after cleaning. If spots remain, you could camouflage stained grout with a white fingernail pencil or white liquid shoe polish. (If you get polish on the tiles, let it dry and then wipe it off with a rag.)

The Toilet Bowl

One-quarter cup of sodium bisulfate (sodium acid sulfate) can be sprinkled into a wet toilet bowl for a single scrubbing and flushing.

(Wear rubber gloves. Let it stand for 15 minutes, and then scrub and flush as usual. (Don't use with chlorine bleach because the resulting fumes would be toxic.)

Rust stains under a toilet bowl rim sometimes yield to laundry bleach-but be sure to protect your hands with plastic or rubber gloves. (Note: Never combine bleach with toilet-bowl cleaners; the mix can release toxic gases.) Rub off truly stubborn stains with extra-fine steel wool, or with wet-dry sandpaper (available at hardware stores).

Cola that has gone flat can be spilled into the toilet bowl and left for an hour. The soft drink will clean the bowl.

Chemical toilet bowl cleaners should never be used to clean the bathtub or sink; the chemical will ruin the finish.

The Bathtub

A ring around the tub can be rubbed away without cleaners with a nylon-net ball or pad.

Cover a stubborn ring with a paste of cream of tartar and hydrogen peroxide. When the paste dries, wipe it off-along with the ring. To enjoy

your bath without worrying about leaving a tub ring, add a capful of mild liquid dishwashing detergent to the bath water.

To get rid of rust stains on a bathtub, try rubbing them with a paste of borax powder and lemon juice. If the stain persists, use a dry-cleaning solution.

An old nylon stocking rolled into a ball becomes a non scratch scrub pad for cleaning sink and tub.

Clean a rubber or vinyl bathtub mat by tossing it into the washer with bath towels. The terry cloth scrubs the mat, and everything comes out clean.

Shower enclosures are a chore to keep clean-but they can be less of a problem if you follow these suggestions: Keep mildew from taking hold by wiping shower walls with a towel after each shower, while you're still in the tub. When the walls need a thorough cleaning, run the shower water at its hottest temperature so the steam will loosen the dirt. Then, using a sponge mop, clean: in a jiffy with a mixture of 1/2 cup vinegar, 1 cup clear ammonia, and 1/4 cup baking soda in 1 gallon of warm water. After cleaning, rinse with clear water. Note: Never use harsh abrasive powders or steel-wool pads.

Having trouble getting mineral deposits off a shower head? Remove the head, take it apart, and soak it in vinegar. Then brush deposits loose with an old toothbrush. Clean the holes by poking them with a wire, pin, toothpick, or ice pick.

Lemon oil will remove water spots on metal frames around shower doors and enclosures.

Glass shower doors will sparkle again if you clean them once a week with a sponge dipped in white vinegar.

To prevent shower curtains from wrinkling after washing, put them in the washing machine with 1/2 cup of detergent and 1/2 cup of baking soda, along with two large bath towels. Add a cup of vinegar to the rinse cycle, then hang the curtains up immediately after washing and let them air dry.

Keep a new shower curtain looking fresh by using the old shower curtain as a liner. Hang the new curtain on the same hooks, but in front of the old curtain. The old curtain will take the beating from water and soap scum while the new one stays squeaky clean.

When you clean a plastic shower curtain, keep it soft and flexible by adding a few drops of mineral oil to the rinse water. Maintain the curtain's softness by wiping it occasionally with a solution of warm water and mineral oil.

Mirrors

To make your bathroom mirror sparkle, polish it with a cloth dipped in a borax-and-water solution or in denatured alcohol. Or polish with dry facial tissue, a lint-free cloth, paper toweling, or old nylon stockings.

Rubbing alcohol will wipe away hair-spray haze on a mirror.

You can defog a bathroom mirror quickly by spraying it with hot air from a hair dryer.

Mirrors in your bathroom won't steam up if you run an inch of cold water in the bathtub before adding hot water.

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6. Carpets and Upholstery

Acid stains on a carpet or on upholstery should be immediately diluted and neutralized with baking soda and water, or with club soda. The same solutions will also keep vomit stains from setting.

If someone spills an alcoholic drink on carpet or upholstery, instantly dilute the spot with cold water so that the alcohol doesn't have time to attack the dyes. If red wine is the culprit) dilute it with white wine, then clean the spot with cold water and cover it with table salt. Wait 10 minutes, then vacuum up the salt.

Some homemakers use a paste of laundry starch and cold water to lift blood stains from carpet or upholstery. The paste is allowed to dry and then brushed away.

Dampen blood stains on carpet or upholstery with cold water. (Hot water sets the stains') Then apply carpet or upholstery shampoo and follow this treatment by applying dry-cleaning fluid.

To remove chewing gum that is stuck on the carpet, press an ice cube against the gum. The gum will harden and can then be pulled off. Treat any last traces of gum with a spot remover.

Blot coffee stains quickly and dilute with plain water.

Use dry-cleaning fluid on tar spots, but apply it sparingly and blot regularly.

If there's candle wax on carpet or upholstery, put an ice cube in a plastic bag and hold it against the wax. When the wax becomes brittle, chip it away with a dull knife.

Here's another way to remove candle wax from carpet or upholstery: Place a blotter over the wax spot and press with a warm iron until the blotter absorbs the melted wax. Move the blotter frequently so that it doesn't get oversaturated.

You can occasionally remove crayon marks on carpet or upholstery by using the iron-and-blotter treatment that's effective with candle wax; you can also try dabbing at them using a cloth moistened with dry-cleaning fluid.

Absorb butter stains-and other greasy household stains on carpet or upholstery-with cornmeal, dried and ground corn cobs, or dry-cleaning fluid.

To remove no butter-type grease stains on carpet or upholstery, scrape up as much spilled grease as possible and apply dry-cleaning fluid with a cloth. Or rub with paint thinner, cover with salt, and vacuum. Another alternative: Sprinkle with cornmeal, leave overnight, and vacuum.

Use hair spray to lift ballpoint ink stains from carpet or upholstery. Use dry-cleaning fluid, applied with a cloth, on other ink stains. Here's another way to cope with ink stains: Sprinkle them with salt. As ink is absorbed, brush the salt away and sprinkle again. Repeat as necessary.

Try to remove mildew from carpet or upholstery with white vinegar. If spots remain, rub with dry-cleaning fluid. Note: Eliminate moist conditions or the mildew will return.

Lift nail polish with prepared polish removers or acetone, but apply these sparingly and with great care because they can damage the

Carpet or upholstery.

To remove wet latex paint spots on carpet or upholstery, dab with water. To remove wet oil-based paint spots, dab with turpentine, then absorb the turpentine with cornmeal. In either case, follow with an application of dry-cleaning fluid or shampoo.

Allow mud spots to dry, then brush softly to loosen the dirt and vacuum.

If your pets have accidents on carpet or upholstery, blot the stains with water, then clean with club soda. A mix of equal parts of white vinegar and water is also effective.

Remove animal hair from furniture by wiping with a damp sponge. Dabbing with pieces of Scotch tape also works well.

You can remove soot stains by sprinkling generously with salt, allowing the salt to settle for several minutes, and vacuuming both salt and soot.

The best way to clean vinyl upholstery is with baking soda on a damp cloth, followed by a light washing with a dishwashing soap. Never use oil; it will only harden the upholstery.

If your carpet sweeper misses lint, string, and other small debris, just dampen the brushes.

Carpet odors can be eliminated by sprinkling baking soda on the carpet before vacuuming, or by doing the same thing with 1 cup of borax mixed with 2 cups of cornmeal. (Let the latter mixture stand for an hour before vacuuming.)

Repairing Carpets

Just as fabric softener takes static cling out of your laundry, it can remove static" shock" from your carpet. Spray your carpet lightly with a mix of 5 parts water and 1 part liquid softener and you won't have to worry about shocks when you touch metallic objects.

To raise depressions left in carpets by heavy furniture, try steaming them. Hold an iron close enough for steam to reach the carpet, but don't let the iron touch the fibers, especially if they're synthetic, because they could melt. Lift the fibers by sera ping them with the edge of a coin or spoon.

Rugs will last longer if you occasionally rotate them to change areas of wear, or if you rearrange furniture to alter traffic patterns.

When a carpet thread is loose, snip it level with the pile. If you try to pull out the thread you risk unraveling part of the carpet.

To repair a large burned area in a carpet, cut out the damaged area and substitute a patch of identical size and shape. Secure the new piece with double-faced carpet tape and latex adhesive.

You needn't hide a carpet burn with furniture. If the burn isn't down to the backing, just snip off the charred part with fingernail scissors. However, if a carpet burn does extend to the backing, snip off the charred fibers and put white glue in the opening. Then, snip fibers from a scrap or an inconspicuous part of the carpet (perhaps in a closet). When the glue gets tacky, poke the fibers into place.

To prevent small area rugs from slipping out from under you, attach strips of double-faced carpet tape under the corners.

Has the pile on your shag rug flattened? You can raise it with a lightweight bamboo yard rake.

Should your spot-remover efforts alter the color of carpet or upholstery, try touching up small places with artists' acrylic paint. If that doesn't work, try a felt marker or a permanent ink marker of the appropriate color-and go slowly.

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7. Window Treatments

Draperies and Curtains Old keys make good drapery weights.

To keep drapery hem folds in position, insert wire solder or plastic-covered wire. Bend the wire into the desired shapes after hanging the draperies.

To prevent a curtain rod from snagging when sliding it through a curtain, slip a piece of aluminum foil or a thimble over its tip.

Do your draperies gap in the middle when you close them? They won't if you sew a small magnet into both center seams at the same height from the floor.

To make sure that curtain tie-backs are exactly opposite each other, use the bottom edge of the window shade as your guide when you install them.

Before washing a curtain, shake it outdoors to remove accumulated dust.

Blinds

If you wear cotton gloves when washing Venetian blinds you can use your fingers to rub the slats-this works better than any brush. Another way to wash Venetian blinds is to hang them from

a clothesline and turn a hose on them. You can also wash them under the shower. Use mild soap and water.

If you're interrupted while cleaning Venetian blinds, clasp a clothespin to the last slat you cleaned so you'll know where you left off.

To prevent Venetian blind tapes from shrinking when cleaned, re-hang the blinds before the tapes dry.

Make yellowed Venetian blind tapes white again by applying liquid white shoe polish.

To install a new Venetian blind cord, tape or sew the end of the new one to the old one. Slowly pull out the old cord and you'll pull the new one into place at the same time.

Spray Venetian blind pulleys with a silicone lubricant to keep them working smoothly

Shades

Use wallpaper cleaner or an art gum eraser to lift spots from window shades. If an un-washable window shade needs cleaning, rub it with a rough flannel cloth dipped in cornmeal or flour.

A window shade that has too much tension can be removed from its bracket and unrolled by hand 2 or 3 revolutions to make it less tense after it is replaced.

A shade that won't lift properly needs more tension. Remove it, roll it up 2 or 3 revolutions, and reinstall it.

Use a silicone spray instead of oil on a window-shade mechanism. (Oil will soak through the wood roller and ruin your shade.)

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