

Spring cleaning...

That annual ritual we all love to hate

Wood needs special attention

(NU)—Most of us start the season off fresh with the age-old ritual of spring cleaning. But if you're like most people, you probably don't know that the wood in your house - furniture, floors, mantles, cabinets, paneling and painted wood - takes an extra beating during the winter months.

Indoor heat often robs the wood of much-needed moisture, and soot generated by fireplaces can further dry out the wood. In addition, some heating systems produce a film that settles on wood surfaces. Left uncleaned, this film can affect the wood's beauty.

That's why spring is the perfect time to do a thorough cleaning and begin a year-round, wood-cleaning routine. The experts at Murphy-Phoenix Company, makers of Murphy's Oil Soap, offer the

Clean Wood In Your Home Regularly



Source: Murphy's Oil Soap
Heidi E. Capousis for News USA

following advice to help you maintain the beauty of the wood in your home:

- Dust and clean wood regularly with a cloth slightly dampened with a gentle soap product.
- Occasional waxing and oiling can further protect the finish. But remember to clean the surface with a mild, natural soap to remove the waxy buildup before reapplying wax.
- Kitchen cabinets and tables demand more constant cleaning, since grease, smoke and food stains accumulate and can harden over time.
- Sweep or vacuum wood floors frequently, and wash regularly with a mild soap. This will remove dust and other particles tracked into the house.

Below knee and above eye level: Good rule for spring cleaning

(NU)—Spring cleaning should include areas that may be missed during regular day-to-day cleaning activities.

These areas include ceiling light fixtures, draperies, the tops of door and window frames, and underneath furniture, according to ServiceMaster, a recognized leader in heavy-duty residential and commercial cleaning services.

Dr. William Bond, vice president for Technical Development for ServiceMaster, advises that "a good rule of thumb for front-line cleaning troops is to concentrate on cleaning everything that's below knee level and above eye level, as those areas are more likely to get missed during regular cleaning."

Aside from cleaning areas that may typically be overlooked, a good, once-a-year cleaning in the spring is necessary to remove the mold and mildew that tend to build up during cooler winter months. Closed-up, heated homes cause musty odors within a home and add to problems many people have with allergies.

Below eye level, ServiceMaster urges homeowners to vacuum underneath furniture, as well as dust in corners and around the bottom areas of furniture. With hard surface floors, vacuum or mop regularly, and apply floor finish two or three times a year. During the spring, clean baseboards by wiping them with a rag dipped in a mild detergent.

Above eye level, Bond recommends dusting light fixtures and window and door frames. Draperies also require spring-cleaning attention.

"A drapery's close proximity to a window causes it to collect as much or more dirt as other furnishings and also leads to deterioration of the fabric," Bond said. "To avoid this, vacuum the header or remove dust and cobwebs, and professionally dry-clean the rest of the drapes every two years."

Bond cautions homeowners

against vacuuming the entire drapery, as the suction pulls dirt from the far side into the center of the fabric, where it could get caught in the weave.

In some areas of the country, spring cleaning is further challenged by salt and water that are tracked into the home following snows.

Carrying out a comprehensive cleaning effort will rid your home of the unwelcome dirt and dust of winter, and leave you ready for the sunshine and warm weather to come.

Outdoor chores: That first mowing

By BOB TRACINSKI
John Deere Corp.

Spring has sprung, the grass is growin'! I wonder how that mower's doin'?

Ever find yourself asking the same question? With spring-time's arrival, most homeowners do. The last time most of us thought about our lawn mower was in the fall when we pushed it into a dark corner, happy to have one less chore to do. But eventually, one bright, sunny morning we all face the inevitable - that first spring clipping.

Before you turn a key or pull a cord, do yourself a favor. Take a few minutes to think about your mower and how to use it safely. It could make the difference between a summertime full of fun activity and a serious accident.

Whether you've just bought a brand new machine or are simply dusting off "old reliable," the key to mower safety is knowing your equipment and how to use it properly. That means reading the operator's manual and familiarizing yourself with mowing techniques.

Over the seasons, here are some safety tips I try to keep in mind.

Dress for the job.

Wear close-fitting clothes, long slacks and closed-toe shoes with traction soles for protection. Tuck in that shirttail and avoid dangling jewelry or flowing scarves.

Take a hike

Before you mow for the first time each spring, take a hike, or at least a walk, around the lawn. Pick up any stones, sticks, toys or other debris that can get caught in whirling blades and become unidentified flying objects.

Gas up.

Be sure to add the correct fuel or fuel mixture for your mower.

If you smoke, leave cigarettes, matches or lighters inside so you're not tempted to light up. Add fuel outdoors where there's plenty of ventilation and never, never add fuel when the engine is running or hot.

Clean up.



Remember to think safety first when preparing for that first mowing of the season.

Move the mower away from any gasoline that may have spilled before starting the engine. Store fuel in an approved safety container.

Check-up.

Visually inspect your mower. Make sure all safety devices are in place and working. Tighten nuts, bolts and screws to keep equipment in safe working condition. Replace worn or broken parts immediately. Keep guards and safety shields in place. If you haven't had your mower serviced in a while, you may want to take it to an authorized service center for a maintenance checkup.

If it's not running right, turn it off!

Don't be tempted to make even the slightest adjustment to your mower with the engine running. Even if you have a "hard-starter," turn off the mower and give the engine and muffler time to cool before working on the machine. On riding equipment, disconnect the battery ground cable before working on the electrical system.

A lawn mower is a powerful cutting tool and like any high-speed equipment with sharp blades, it needs to be operated with your complete attention and a great deal of respect. It takes only a few moments to make sure that you and your equipment are properly prepared to kick off the new mowing season. Investing the time to get to know your lawn mower and observing

a few basic safety rules will help prevent mishaps and ensure a safety mowing season. Happy Mowing!

Here are some common questions I'm often asked about safe mowing techniques:

Are there any specific safety tips for mowing in "tricky" areas like hillsides and around trees?

If you have sloping ground in your yard, mow across the slope with a walk-behind mower. That way, should you trip and fall, the mower is less likely to tumble onto you. With a riding mower, travel up and down a slope because this is more stable. If a slope is simply too steep to mow safely, plant a decorative groundcover to avoid mowing the area altogether. Likewise, consider a groundcover for tight corners that require you to mow forward, then back up. Spread shredded tree bark or pine straw along the borders of the lawn and around trees. This saves trim time and prevents damage to trees from the mower hitting against the trunks. Fill low spots with soil and replant grass to avoid turning an ankle while you mow. If you have trees on your lawn, prune lower branches that can flick an eye or knock you off balance while mowing.

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