

How to make cleaning chores easier & finish faster

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BY KIM HARNETT

CORRESPONDENT

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NORTH JERSEY — Besides keeping the house tidy – not only a relief when company pops in, but also a more pleasant environment for you and your family – quick cleanings throughout the week greatly reduce the time you need to spend on your big weekly cleaning.

Listening to CDs could make cleaning more enjoyable.

The first rule of cleaning? Have less stuff.

"Reducing clutter can reduce your cleaning by up to 40 percent! So try to eliminate clutter," says Linda Anders owner of COC Enterprises LLC (Cleaning, Organizing, and Consulting.)

The next consideration is your arsenal of cleaning supplies. Rather than stocking up on every new product out there, stock a few trusted multipurpose cleaners, along with the requisite rags, sponges, toothbrushes and other cleaning hardware.

Be sure to maintain your equipment, and replace it when it becomes worn, says **Anders**. Nothing short-circuits a cleaning more quickly than a raggedy sponge or misplaced cleaning products.

Try keeping all the products in one place: a bucket with a handle or a caddy you can carry around with you. Better still, "get an apron with large pockets to wear while cleaning. Stock the apron full of all of your cleaning necessities such as rags, cleaning wipes, polishes and brushes. By keeping all of the necessary products and tools within arm's reach, you will save the time and momentum wasted by running back and forth to the cleaning closet," states sheknows.com.

One more thing before you get started: music. Pick out a few of your favorite upbeat CDs and put them on shuffle for a non-stop mix of music that will make the time you spend cleaning seem both shorter and more enjoyable.

When you start, it's good to get into the habit of cleaning from top to bottom, left to right. Not only are you assured of not dirtying anything you've previously cleaned this way, but you'll also be less likely to miss things.

When you do your quick clean, you're going to want to focus on the rooms you spend the most time in, which also happen to be those most likely to be seen by drop-in guests: the living room, kitchen, and bathrooms.

The living room is probably the easiest of these to clean. Be sure to have everyone pick up their own possessions from this common area every night before bed. This is half the battle. Tidy the sofa – plump cushions and pillows, fold any throws neatly, and use a lint brush or handheld vacuum to remove any stray hair or crumbs. Use a microfiber cloth to wipe down any obvious dust.

"Wipe down mini-blinds with a damp fabric softener sheet. This eliminates the static that causes dust to stick. The same trick works for TV and monitor screens," according to merrymaids.com. Tidy any coffee-table books or collections, and put any remotes in a drawer or decorative storage box.

Do a quick sweep or vacuum the floor. "Eighty percent of the dirt in your house walks in through the door on people's feet. The right kind of mats placed inside and out of all entrances will help cut down on cleaning time," cites cleaning company Merry Maids on its website. "Choose professional mats you see at the entrances of hospitals and supermarkets, which are available at a janitorial supply store. They're called walk-off mats because they give the dirt a chance to be walked off before it gets in," according to the site.

If you do opt for an interior mat, be sure to vacuum or shake it out regularly. Another fantastic preventive measure is to request guests to remove their shoes when they enter the house, although some people aren't comfortable with this practice.

On to the bathroom – this is one of the rooms in your house where you want to be thorough. Before you start the cleaning take a minute and put either a cup of bleach in your toilet or, if you have a septic tank, sprinkle in a little baking soda. Let it sit.

While that's sitting, get busy elsewhere. For the sink, use a water-vinegar mix on a paper towel to clean up any obvious streaks, spots, or toothpaste blobs. This same paper towel can be used, after folding it over, to wipe the mirror, the faucets, and the back of the toilet. If the smell of vinegar isn't your favorite, fill the sink with a pump of hand soap and some warm water. It shouldn't be overly sudsy – you only need a small amount of the soap. Using a paper towel, sponge, or rag, clean the sink and faucets.

Disposable cleaning wipes are great for quick, mid-week cleanings. Use one for the sink, then flip it over for the toilet. These have the added benefit of being disinfectant, as well. Finally, scrub the toilet bowl out and flush the cleanser.

Shake the bath mat or rug outside, and sweep the floor, and you're done. For a nice finishing touch, if you have linen spray or fabric refresher, spray it on the carpet and towels for a fresh, clean scent.

The kitchen has the potential to be a big job if you don't stay on top of it. Get everyone in the habit of scraping dirty dishes into the garbage, rinsing, and immediately putting them into the dishwasher. An empty sink is easy to quickly wipe clean with a damp sponge. Use a multipurpose cleaner and that same sponge or rag to clean countertops, stovetops, and spot clean any appliances. Finally, check out the floor. Any spills that weren't cleaned immediately have the potential to become sticky dirt magnets. Wet your mop with hot water and scrub them right away, and your floor looks nice and is relatively clean until you're ready to do your full cleaning.