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HOMEOWNER'S — UPDATE —

Home Maintenance Myths

Everyone loves a good home-maintenance hack, but some things we've been told don't hold up. These common practices could be doing more harm than good.

Myth: Ceiling fans are only used to cool rooms.

A quality ceiling fan can help control your home's temperature in both the summer and winter. During the summer, set the blades to rotate counter-clockwise. This pushes air downwards, creating a wind-chill effect that makes you feel cooler. In the winter, reverse the rotation. As warm air rises, the fan redistributes it throughout the room, helping the space feel warmer and reducing heating costs.

Myth: Closing air vents in unused rooms saves energy.

If you're trying to save energy by closing off vents in unused rooms, you could be putting unnecessary stress on your HVAC system. Closing vents disrupts airflow, forcing the system to work harder and can lead to inefficiency or damage.

Myth: Cutting your lawn short allows you to mow less frequently.

While it's true that a shortly sheared lawn takes longer to grow back, mowing too short could cause grass to dry out quickly and become more vulnerable to pests, weeds and heat. To maintain a lush, healthy lawn, leave 2-3 inches of length when you mow.

Myth: Turning off lights is the best way to save electricity.

Also in this issue...

Plants That Purify

Sleep Deprived? Your
Bedroom May Be To
Blame

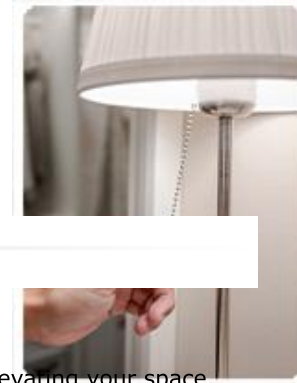
Avoid Donating These
Items

Cowboy Casserole

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While turning off lights when not in use can save on energy costs, you'll likely save more in the long run by replacing your incandescent light bulbs with LED versions. LEDs use up to 75%–90% less energy, making them a much more efficient choice for lighting your home.

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Plants That Purify

Breathe easier with these popular plants that improve air quality while elevating your space.

Place an **elephant ear philodendron** in your living room for an environment-cleansing statement piece. Consider **potted mums** or **Gerbera daisies** as purifying pops of color.

Certain herbs like **rosemary** don't just smell nice in the kitchen — their fresh and invigorating aroma can help keep you alert and focused. **Snake plants** and **pothos** are beginner-friendly plants that help filter out carbon monoxide and other toxins.

A bathroom with low light and high humidity is no problem for air-cleaning **bamboo** or **Chinese evergreens**.

Place **lavender** near your bed to help you fall asleep. **Spider plants** are great for clearing the air, which can improve your sleep quality.

Be mindful that some plants can be toxic to children and pets.

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Sleep Deprived? Your Bedroom May Be To Blame

Like proper nutrition and regular exercise, getting enough sleep is essential to good health. Yet one in three American adults has trouble sleeping. If you struggle with sleep, adjusting your environment may help you reach the recommended 7 to 8 hours each night.

- Start with a quality mattress in a size proportional to the room. Arrange furniture so the space isn't overcrowded, leaving a clear path to the bathroom.
- Choose calm, soothing colors for walls and bedding.
- Keep the room fresh by airing it out during the day.
- Personalize with simple decor that's meaningful to you. Reduce clutter so the space is cozy, not chaotic.
- Consider hanging blackout curtains or shades, and eliminate phones, tablets and TVs in the

bedroom.

- Block disruptive sound with a white noise machine or an app that plays peaceful music.
- Lower the thermostat at night. Ideally, bedrooms should be between 65° and 68° for better sleep.
- Try aromatherapy by placing a cotton ball lightly dipped in lavender or other relaxing essential oils near your pillow.

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Avoid Donating These Items

When decluttering your home, it can be tempting to toss everything that's taking up space, but think twice before putting these items in the giveaway box.

Family Heirlooms

While you might not be the biggest fan of Grandma's fine china, your cousin may want that bit of family history. Check with family members before sending heirlooms to the thrift store.

Damaged Items

There's a difference between gently used and falling apart. Stained and torn clothing or broken furniture should be discarded.

Collectibles

Do a little research before donating things like old playing cards, books or jewelry. They may have monetary value, so consider taking them to a consignment store or selling them online.

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Cowboy Casserole

Ingredients

2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1 yellow onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, sliced
1 lb. ground beef
1 (1 oz.) pkg. taco seasoning
1 (15 oz.) can black beans, drained
1 (15 oz.) can pinto beans, drained
1 (14.5 oz.) can fire-roasted diced tomatoes
1 (4 oz.) can diced green chiles
¼ cup sour cream
¾ cup shredded Cheddar, *divided*
1 tsp. hot sauce



1 cup frozen corn kernels
1 (16 oz.) bag frozen tater tots
Fresh parsley for garnish

Directions

Preheat oven to 350° F. Heat oil in a large skillet on medium-high. Cook onion until softened, then stir in garlic and cook for 1 more minute. Crumble in ground beef and cook until browned. Mix in taco seasoning.

Add beans, tomatoes, chiles, sour cream, ½ cup cheese, and hot sauce to skillet. Cook for 5 minutes until liquid thickens. Stir in corn and pour mixture into a greased 11x7-inch baking dish.

Top mixture with tater tots in a single layer. Cover with foil and bake for 25 minutes. Remove foil, sprinkle with remaining cheese and cook for 15–20 more minutes until tots are crisp and cheese is melted. Garnish with fresh parsley. Cool slightly before serving.



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