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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Spring Cleaning for Your Yard

As the weather warms up, it's time to focus your spring cleaning efforts outside the house. Prepare your lawn and landscaping for the upcoming summer months with these simple steps.

Lawn

- Pick up debris such as twigs, litter and pet waste.
- When the grass is dry, rake up lingering leaves and thatch (matted dead grass).
- If there are any bare spots in your yard, sprinkle with a combination of topsoil, grass seed and fertilizer.

Trees and shrubs

- Cut off any branches that are dead, diseased or encroaching on walkways.
- Tie the tops of ornamental grasses, and cut them as close to the ground as possible.
- Prune flowering bushes like roses and hydrangeas before they begin to bloom. Remove dead, damaged or crowded stems, and shape as desired. Shrubs like lilacs and forsythia, which bloom in early spring, should not be pruned until after they bloom.

Flower beds

- Remove weeds, dead plants and old mulch.
- Till the ground and add landscape fabric to flower beds to keep weeds at bay.
- Reinforce current perennials with compost. Spread a new layer of mulch after spring planting is complete.

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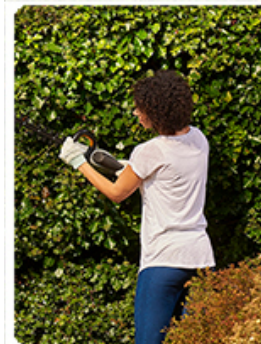
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Streamline Your Home Office

Set yourself up for success by decluttering your at-home workspace.

Split the room. Whether your home office is its own room or a corner of a larger living space, sectioning off the area can help you cut down on clutter. *HGTV.com* suggests setting up the desk as your "work center," a bookshelf as your "reference center" and a file cabinet as your "supply center." Aim to keep your work center clear, and put everything else back where it belongs when you're finished using it.

Hide the cords. Exposed cords from computers, printers, shredders, and other devices look messy and can be stress inducing. Use multi-outlet surge protectors and cable ties to consolidate cords, and then do your best to conceal them behind your office furnishings.

Address the papers. Bills, mail and miscellaneous papers always tend to accumulate on desks, so setting up a filing system will serve you well in the long run. Organize papers into three categories: urgent, important and archives. Keep the urgent papers in plain view near your work center. Place the important documents in an easily accessible area such as a paper tray on your desk or inside a folder in your top drawer. Finally, sort archive papers into hanging folders inside of a file cabinet. This will help you keep those documents organized but out of sight.

Consider these mental and physical effects of clutter, according to *PsychologyToday.com*.

- Clutter serves as extra stimuli and can distract you from your priorities.
- Being disorganized causes a vague sense of unease because you don't know exactly how long something will take to complete. For instance, "I don't know what projects are lurking in that pile of papers."
- Clutter can cause feelings of embarrassment, anxiety or guilt, which in turn can prevent you from being more creative and productive as you work.
- Tackle clutter one space at a time. When you see progress, you'll be more likely to stay motivated.
- If you feel overwhelmed or are struggling to let items go, consider hiring a professional organizer.

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House-Hunting Red Flags

When searching for your next home, keep your eyes open for potential warning signs. These seemingly insignificant details could cost you down the road, according to *Realtor.com*[®].

- **Strong scents:** Be cautious if you're hit by a strong whiff of fragrant candles or overpowering air freshener. Excessive scents could be masking offensive odors such as pet accidents, mildew or smoke. Be sure to inspect each room's walls, floors and ceilings for potential foul-smelling flaws.
- **Nearby water:** A stream or pond in (or near) the backyard may provide a picturesque view. Just be sure to find out whether the property is located in a flood zone and flood insurance is required.
- **Sloppy tiling:** Gaps or uneven tiling may mean the job was done by an inexperienced worker and could indicate there were other home projects done on the fly. A poorly executed remodel could result in expensive repairs in the future.
- **Cosmetic touch-ups:** To be safe, examine freshly painted walls and check underneath area rugs. While these enhancements may have been added to spruce up the room, they could be hiding a larger problem such as a water leak or pet stains.

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How to Get Sparkling Windows

Cleaning your windows can be a daunting task when you're trying to make your home look its best. Here are some tips and tricks to make the chore easier and leave you with sparkling, streak-free windows.

Instead of using paper towels or newspapers, wipe your windows with a microfiber cloth. The tiny loops in the fabric are perfect for trapping dirt and dust without damaging the glass. *GoodHousekeeping.com* recommends choosing a cloudy but dry day to clean the outside of your windows. This will prevent the cleaning solution from drying too

quickly and leaving stubborn streaks.

Try wiping inside glass horizontally and outside glass vertically. This helps you easily spot any streaks – and know whether they are inside or outside – before the cleaning solution is completely dry.

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Blackened Shrimp Tacos

Ingredients

6 small tortillas

For coleslaw:

5 Tbsp. mayonnaise

½ Tbsp. honey

1 tsp. Dijon mustard

1 tsp. red wine vinegar

¼ tsp. *each* salt and pepper

1 (8 oz.) bag tricolor coleslaw mix

3 green onions, sliced

For shrimp:

½ lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined

1-2 Tbsp. blackened seasoning

1 Tbsp. butter

1 clove garlic, minced



Directions

In a bowl, mix together all coleslaw ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Place shrimp in a zip-top bag and add 1-2 Tbsp. blackened seasoning, depending on spice preference. Close bag and shake to coat.

Heat a dry skillet over medium. Toast tortillas on each side until lightly charred. Remove to a plate and cover with a towel. Add butter and garlic to skillet and cook for 1 minute, or until garlic is softened. Add shrimp and sauté until opaque, about 3-5 minutes. Build tacos by layering coleslaw and shrimp in tortillas.

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