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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Gardening With the Family

Cultivating a family garden is a fun, rewarding way to nurture curiosity and teamwork. It's also a great way to foster healthy lifestyle choices and spend time working together outdoors.

Perhaps you want a flower garden that produces beautiful blooms for cutting or a vegetable garden that provides fresh produce for everyone to enjoy. Once you know what kind of garden you want to grow, select a patch of land that gets plenty of sunlight and can be easily watered. Consider testing the soil to ensure your garden will thrive. If you find it's not suitable for gardening, try building a box garden or using planters filled with better soil.

Gardening offers plenty of opportunities for younger kids to help with simple, supervised tasks, such as digging small holes for planting, watering growing vines and harvesting vegetables when they're ready. However, digging up larger areas, using fertilizers or working with thorny plants are chores that should be left to the adults.

If your outdoor space is limited, an indoor garden is a fun way to bring nature inside. All you need is a warm, sunny spot — even if it's just a small corner. For the chefs in your family, consider planting a windowsill herb garden. You can also try growing seasonal flowers that need less sunlight. Low-maintenance succulents are a great option for young kids, as plants like cacti require less time and care.

For a whimsical touch, decorate stones or paint signs and place them in your garden alongside what you've grown together.

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Prepare Your Home for Summer

Don't: Scrub Harder, Do: Clean Smarter

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Prepare Your Home for Summer

Spring has arrived, which means summer isn't far behind. Before things heat up, take time to get your home ready for the sunny season ahead. Here's a simple checklist to help your home transition

smoothly into summer.

- Keep your home cool and comfortable by **reversing your ceiling fans** so they rotate counterclockwise, creating a refreshing breeze.
- **Schedule a sprinkler system checkup** to repair any damage sustained during the winter months. A professional will check for leaks and ensure sprinkler heads are functioning properly.
- Make an appointment to **have your HVAC system and air-flow dampers** set for seasonal changes. You can adjust vents in individual rooms to your comfort level. Ensure air filters are cleaned or replaced.
- **Clear dirt and debris from your gutters** to help prevent water damage and backups during summer rains.

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Don't: Scrub Harder Do: Clean Smarter

Start off your home's spring cleaning on the right foot with a few moves that can save time, effort and money.

Don't: Do it all yourself.
Do: Delegate.

Most household messes aren't made by one person, so cleaning shouldn't fall on one person either. Give simple chores like putting away toys to younger kids, and ask teens to help with dusting and vacuuming.

Don't: Immediately purchase new supplies or organizers.
Do: Declutter first.

Avoid spending money on items that may not be needed after decluttering. It's best to begin by clearing your home of unnecessary things before buying new tools or storage containers.

Don't: Focus only on high-traffic areas.
Do: Clean overlooked spots.

Messy countertops and dirty floors are often high priorities on the checklist, but don't forget the less visible areas of your home. Wiping dusty ceiling fans, vacuuming cobwebs in corners, and cleaning baseboards are important but often missed cleaning tasks.

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Fix Those Annoying Sounds Around Your House

Life can be noisy. If your house is adding to the clatter, try these simple hacks to quiet the chaos.

- **Clanging pipes** can usually be quieted by lowering the water pressure.
- **Rattling ceiling fans** often result from loose blades. Tightening them can eliminate the noise.
- **Creaky floors** may result from loose nails in the floorboards and can often be fixed with screws or wood glue.
- **Running toilets** typically signal a worn flapper valve, which is readily available at most hardware stores.
- **Squeaky doors** are easily fixed by lubricating the hinges.

- **Whistling windows** can often be sealed with weather stripping.
- **Shaking washers and dryers** may be steadied by leveling them and adding silicone vibration-absorbing pads underneath the appliance.

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Strawberry Cheesecake French Toast

Ingredients

1 (16 oz.) tub cream cheese, softened
1 cup sugar
11 large eggs, divided
2 tsp. lemon juice
1 cup whole milk
½ cup heavy cream
5 Tbsp. maple syrup
2 tsp. vanilla
2 tsp. cinnamon
20 (1-inch) slices French bread
2 cups sliced strawberries

Directions

Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. In a medium bowl, beat cream cheese with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add sugar, then mix in 1 egg and lemon juice. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, whisk the remaining 10 eggs with milk, cream, syrup, vanilla, and cinnamon until well combined. Layer 10 bread slices in baking dish. Spread half of the cream cheese mixture over bread, then add half of the strawberries. Repeat layers. Pour egg mixture over the top. Cover with aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight.

Remove from fridge while oven preheats to 350° F. Keep covered and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake for an additional 30 minutes or until set.

Serves 8-10

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