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A few easy ways to tackle spring cleaning

By Mary Jessica Hammes | Correspondent | Story updated at 7:50 pm on 5/18/2009

If the words "spring cleaning" send a distinctly autumnal chill down your spine, take some advice from Shannon Foley.

"Just keep it small," says the Athens mother of five. "Set a timer, work for small amounts of time and do not aim for perfection. You just want it to be better than it was."

Put friends to work

Foley knows a thing or two about making cleaning easy, even fun. The first step is to make your friends clean your house - really.

You just have to be willing to return the favor.

"When you're in your house and looking at everything there is to do, it seems so overwhelming," Foley says. "It's hard to even know how to begin."

She and two other women gather every Monday at alternating houses to collectively tackle the cleaning.

Their children (11 in all, ranging in age from 2 to 11 years) play together while the women clean rooms, fold laundry, organize closets, even do yard work.

Tasks that would take Foley hours or even days to do on her own usually are done in an hour and a half, she says.

The women enjoy helping each other, Foley says as she discovered the very first time she cleaned a friend's kitchen during their children's play date.

"We were just sitting there, and I said, 'Well, let me help you,' " she recalls. "It felt great to do this thing for her that made a huge difference in her day, and it was no big deal for me."

A little goes a long way

Whether you prefer cleaning alone or making it a social event, it's important to do a little bit of cleaning each day, says Pat Heydlauff, author of "Feng Shui, So Easy a Child Can Do It" (The Lotus Circle, 2009).

"One of the principles in Feng Shui is you need a positive flow of energy in your home," says Heydlauff from her home in Jupiter, Fla. "Clutter is usually enemy No. 1 - it restricts the flow of energy in your life and it becomes stagnant energy."

So stacks of paper, too-full closets, clothes on the floor - "That becomes stagnant energy," she says. "It becomes burdensome."

In a society that emphasizes cleaning "public areas" of your home first - those places guests will see - Heydlauff says the most important room to clean usually is overlooked: the bedroom. In fact, she says, clean that room first, followed by the kitchen.

The bedroom should be "a sanctuary to be nurtured in," she says, and the kitchen is "where you nourish yourself ... the kitchen is the heart of your home, and the bedroom is the soul."

Clean out the bed 'bugs'

When cleaning your bedroom, be sure to look under the bed.

"You need energy to fully circulate around your body at night," Heydlauff says. "If you store things under your bed, you're basically sleeping on clutter that will permeate your unconscious mind."

In any room, she suggests, organize clutter into three boxes marked "keep," "give away" and "throw away."

When Heydlauff cleans, she always lights a scented candle and plays energizing music. When you're done, relax: "Go sit and have a cup of tea and enjoy staring out a window, or meditate a few minutes, or light a candle and watch it burn a few minutes," she says.

Like Foley, Heydlauff recommends cleaning in small amounts of time, but regularly, so the mess doesn't build up and "you don't have to give up a week of your life" to clean it.

"You eat a mile-high chocolate killer cake the same way you eat a small brownie: one bite at a time," Heydlauff says. "You clean a massive project one piece at a time so it isn't overwhelming."

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