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SPRING Home & Lawn

Spring cleaning: A growing checklist

Staff reports

news@morningsun.net

Is duct cleaning on your spring cleaning checklist? Some people think it should be.

Chuck Martin of Martin Professional Cleaning and Restoration says it's something homeowners should consider doing every three to five years.

"I believe it's an essential part of home maintenance," Martin said. "It reduces the presence of dust and contaminants. It is surprising how many homes have never had a duct cleaning."

All the things a homeowner must consider can seem overwhelming. But, before you jump into week-end warrior mode (and from the drone of mowers and blowers in the neighborhood, many of you already have), home maintenance experts advise that you make a project checklist. This allows you to prioritize, plan and budget your work. It's also satisfying every time you're able to cross another item off the list. Here are a few suggestions, starting indoors and then moving outside:

Indoor

1. Check the A/C
We're still having some light-jacket weather and most days are comfortable with the windows open, but now is seriously the time to check you're A/C. Don't wait until it's 90 degrees and HVAC technicians are booked solid. Call a qualified HVAC technician and schedule an inspection and, if needed, a tune-up. Not only will it give you confidence that the system will be ready when needed, it can also extend the life of the unit.

2. Examine the water heater
A leaky water heater can really ruin your day, so add it to your spring checklist. If you see any water or signs of rust around the water heater, call a professional to inspect it.

3. Explore for leaks
Basements and attics are places to look for leaks. If you smell or feel musty when you enter the attic or basement, that's a clear sign that water may be making its way inside. Check the walls, ceiling and other materials for discoloration and any signs of water stains. If you find any, you'll want to call a professional immediately.

4. Clean the furnace
If you want your furnace and fireplace to be ready for the first frost of the fall, now is the perfect time to give them some attention. Clean the filter system, blower and motor of your furnace system and if you have a fireplace, call a chimney sweep.



1. Clear roof & clean gutters
In southeast Kansas, we're familiar with the damage wind and rain can do to roofs and gutters, but don't overlook the impact of winter's snow and ice. The season's harsh nature could potentially cause your gutters to crack, fill them up with the last leaves of fall or damage your shingles, which could lead to a leaky roof in the future.

There's no way to know without scaling a ladder and taking a look. If that's not a safe thing for you to do, call a professional. In the U.S., there are more than 164,000 emergency room-treated injuries and 300 deaths that are caused by falls from ladders each year. It's not worth the risk.

It's important to make sure your gutters' downspouts are properly cleared and facing the right direction — away from the foundation.

2. Inspect the foundation
Speaking of the foundation. Now's a good time to check the foundation of your home to make sure the freezing and thawing of winter didn't leave behind any cracks that may allow water into your home's structure.

Seal all cracks and imperfections with the necessary tools — or call a contractor to do the work if you don't feel comfortable doing it yourself. It's also important to look for spots around the house with uneven soil that could potentially allow wa-

ter to pool and push up against your home. If you find any, pack them in with soil or landscape from areas that are away from your home.

3. Reseal woodwork
Take a close look at any wooden decks, wood trim and other wooden structures on the exterior of your home to see if they have been warped, stained or discolored. If they have, it likely means the wood seal has worn off and it's time to reseal.

4. Survey the hardscape
The freezing and thawing of winter can be hard on concrete, asphalt and other hardscaped material. You may be able to patch concrete (like small cracks in the driveway), but you may have to replace the concrete if the cracks are beyond repair.

5. Look for termites
March through June are prime season for termites to thrive and begin damaging your home.

If there are tiny insects flying out of the exterior structure of your home, they could be termites. Call a licensed pest control professional as soon as possible.

6. Scan screens
In the brief weeks before scorching summer arrives, screened doors and windows let that fresh spring air inside and freshen the air in your home. They also keep the bugs out. Carefully scan each screen for any holes that shouldn't be there. Screens can be patched pretty easily with a standard repair kit from the hardware store.

7. Dump standing water
Maybe this should be tip #1. It seems like a no brainer and it's simple to do, but dumping standing water is something many people forget to do. Mosquitoes can spread serious diseases and they can lay eggs in as little as a bottle cap of water.

8. Paint the exterior
Painting the exterior of your home isn't necessary every spring, but now is the perfect time, if it's needed. Alternatively, do it in the fall to avoid the searing heat of summer.

Green thumbs up for Lawn and Garden Month

Dan Morris

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The arrival of spring marks a time when the beauty of nature begins to unfold, inviting us to engage with the outdoors. April, designated as Lawn and Garden Month, celebrates the art and craft of gardening. It was also created to encourage more people into their gardens.

As we enter this month, get ready to don your gardening gloves, breathe in the fresh air and embark on a journey of creation and care in your outdoor spaces. We're sharing tips on how you can celebrate the month and get others involved as well.

The tools of the trade
While gardening can be a fun pastime, it is also a science that requires patience, precision and the right equipment. Whether a seasoned gardener or a green-thumbed newbie, the proper tools can make all the difference in cultivating a thriving garden.

Back to the basics
Specific tools are the backbone of every gardener's arsenal. Equip yourself with a sturdy shovel for digging, a dependable rake to clear debris and spread soil, and durable gloves to protect your hands from unexpected thorns and injuries. For those with a lawn, a high-quality and reliable lawn mower is essential to maintain the length of your grass and keep a neat, well-manicured garden.

For those seasoned gardeners with a basic toolkit ready to go, consider National Garden Month the encouragement you need to upgrade to more specialized tools tailored to your garden's specific needs and gardening goals. For



Delata Fireball are some of the beautiful flowers available at In The Garden.

SARA HANNIGAN / THE MORNING SUN

instance, if you hope to sculpt beautiful hedges or cultivate perennials, a high-quality pair of pruning shears can make all the difference. As your garden goals evolve, further research will help you identify the right equipment to support your gardening journey.

Safety first
While the fun of gardening is undeniable, it comes with a set of safety concerns. High-risk equipment like chainsaws, while efficient for trimming branches and shaping trees, demands caution and respect for safety precautions. For example, chainsaw accidents are not uncommon. The consequences can range from minor cuts to life-threatening injuries. This reality highlights the need to adhere to safety measures, equip yourself with the appropriate protective gear and understand all manufacturers' safety guidelines and instructions. Importantly, this

holds true for all power equipment you use in your garden, ensuring a safe start to this gardening month and continued well-being for practiced gardeners.

Involving children in family gardening
Lawn and Garden Month is a perfect opportunity to introduce children to gardening. Gardening is a great way to connect children to nature, teach them about the environment and help them develop a sense of responsibility. And while there is a wide range of spring activities for kids, gardening can be one of the most rewarding.

Starting simple
At the outset, it is important to prioritize the child's interest rather than their skill or the garden's needs. Having this designated month to promote gardening is a great way to build anticipation and excitement.



Tomato plants are some of the many plants available at In The Garden. SARA HANNIGAN / THE MORNING SUN

Grow smarter not harder with companion planting

Laura Sampson

undefined

Companion planting is a method of gardening that involves placing plants close together for mutual benefit. It's a permaculture tactic and a practice as old as agriculture itself. Using this method can vastly improve your harvests while also protecting soil health.

The practice of companion planting is rooted in the understanding that certain plants can enhance the growth, flavor and health of nearby plants. By strategically pairing plants, gardeners can create an ecosystem that promotes biodiversity and sustainability.

Why we should practice companion planting
There are so many valuable reasons to practice this gardening technique. The top three benefits of companion plants include using less pesticides, growing better

crops and its more eco-friendly to our planet.

Dan Morris, an accomplished gardener and author of Fire and Saw, says, "Companion planting is useful for various purposes. In our garden, we do it primarily for pest control, attracting pollinators, shade and nutrient sharing."

Common companion plant combinations
There are a few popular companion plantings you can easily start using right away. Pick and choose from these popular combinations and increase your garden's output.

Plant tomatoes together with basil and the basil will help repel insects and it's believed to improve the flavor of tomatoes. Likewise, carrots and onions work well together because the smell of onions can deter carrot flies, while carrots are said to repel onion flies and aphids, making them a great pair. Another popular com-

bination is bean plants and corn, the beans fix nitrogen in the soil, which benefits corn, while corn stalks provide a natural trellis for bean vines to climb.

Radishes can help repel cucumber beetles and other pests, so planting radishes and cucumbers together protects the cucumbers. Planting tall flowers like marigolds or nasturtiums with lettuce can provide shade for the lettuce, which prefers cooler temperatures and can help repel pests. Pigweed can lure away leafminers from pepper plants. Just be sure to remove the pigweed before it seeds.

By no means is that a complete list of beneficial companion planting options. There are many more to choose from. Often times a master gardener in your area can help you with more combinations for your specific needs.

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How to Avoid Insect Infestations
Remove any dead or decaying wood, including firewood, fallen branches, and stumps. These can attract termites and provide them with food and shelter. Trim plants away from the house. Ensure there is at least an 18-inch gap between the soil and any wood or siding on your house

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