

Whole House Cleaning

By JOE SZYNKOWSKI | Green Shoot Media

We all try to make cleaning and maintaining our homes a regular habit, but there are those tasks that always get put off or slip our minds completely.

Some of these tasks, like properly maintaining tile grout, can save you major renovation bucks down the road.

Oftentimes, the best home improvement project you can tackle is a deep cleaning of your home.

INSIDE YOUR HOUSE

Doors, knobs and switch plates:

Switch plates can be the worst culprit here, but each of these articles get touched dozens of times per day and are often the recipient of built-up grime.

Baseboards: Sweeping and vacuuming floors is most likely a part of your regular cleaning schedule. But at least once a year, make a point to get on your hands and knees with a bucket of hot water and an abrasive sponge and scrub the baseboards throughout your home.

Tile grout: This area can be so frequently overlooked that you might forget what the original color actually is. There are many grout sprays available that do a decent job, but once a year, all of the grout in your home should be scrubbed meticulously. A toothbrush or other small brush is great at working those high-traffic areas.

Floor registers and other vent covers: Take a screwdriver to these and you will most likely be disgusted at what the underneath sides look like. Most vent covers are made of metal, and so a sink full of hot soapy water



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should clean them easily.

Fan blades: Dust magnets. Dust them regularly. They are the keeper of allergens and get away with it hiding in plain site.

OUTSIDE YOUR HOUSE

Window screens: The easiest way to clean these is to rent a pressure washer at your local hardware store and attach it to your garden hose. Just be sure all of

your windows are closed first.

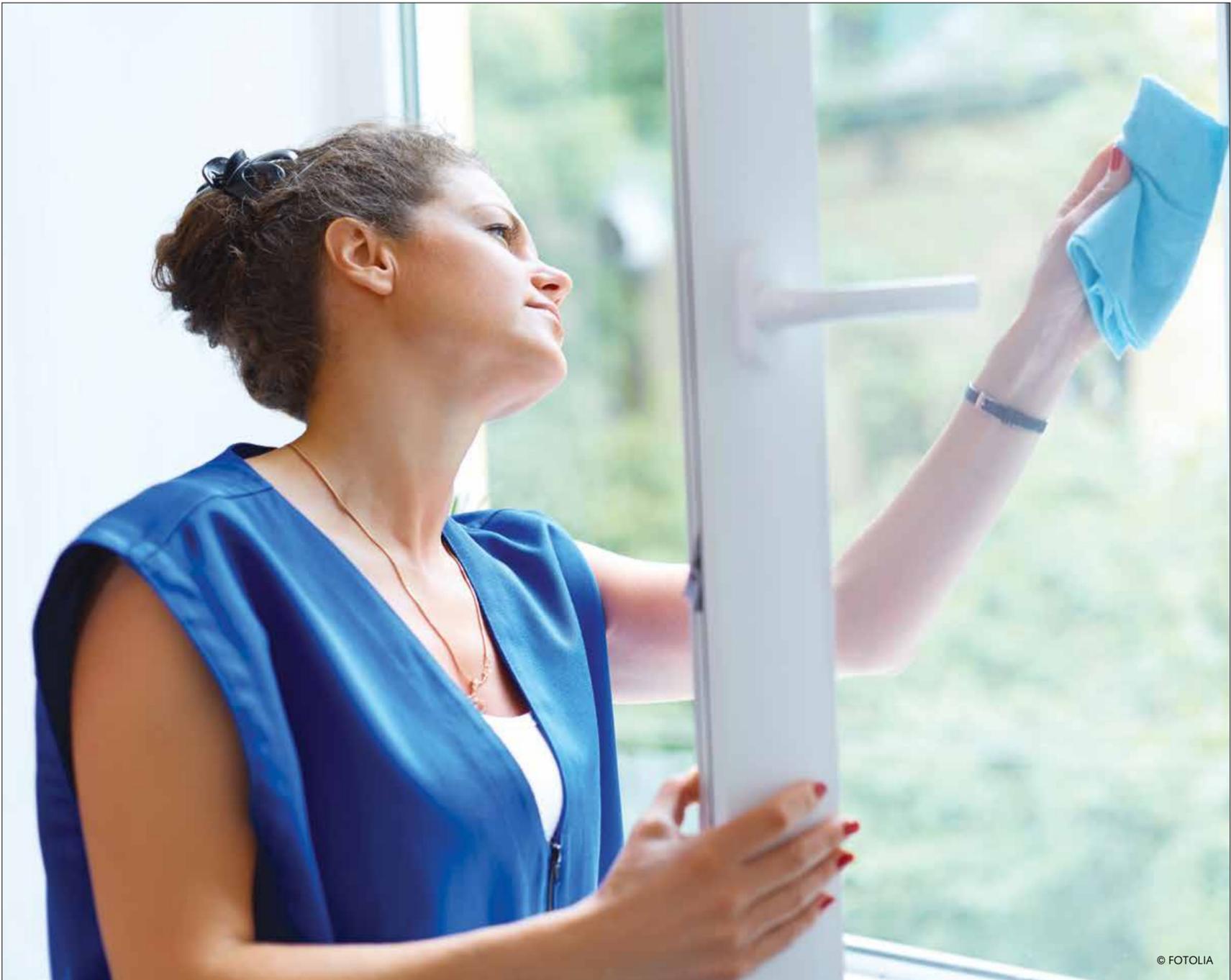
Porches and walkways: Keep swept and weeded. Once a year check for any cracks that need sealing as well as any loose stone or pavers.

Gutters: Get up on a ladder or hire a teen in your neighborhood anxious for some extra cash. It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it. If you leave gutters neglected, they can cause significant damage to your roofing and land-

scaping.

Siding: Again with the pressure washing. If you've never used one, they are magic at getting mildew and the tough dirt that like to hang out in the crevices off your home.

Mailbox: Be sure the numbers are legible and the door opens and closes without problem. Consider painting your mailbox a cheery color, or plant perennial flowers at its base.



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REAL ESTATE 101



Declutter for Dollars

Consumer Reports includes cleaning and decluttering in its list of "Top 5 Ways to Boost the Value of Your Home," estimating a boost of 3-5 percent in value for a \$205,000 home. The magazine recommends that sellers with serious clutter problem hire a professional through the National Association of Professional Organizers. Read the entire Consumer Reports list at <http://bit.ly/1vaRQrr>.

HOMESWISE GLOSSARY

Encroachment: The intrusion onto another's property without right or permission.

Encumbrance: Any claim on a property, such as a lien, mortgage or easement.

SOURCE: Federal Trade Commission

AD SPACE