

Spring Cleaning

Spring is here and it is time for Spring cleaning. An amazing 72% of our population participates in some form of this yearly ritual that dates back centuries and has surprising roots in several major religions and cultures. For example, the Persian New Year starts in Spring and has a ritual that translates as "shaking the house". There are many very logical reasons for a thorough cleaning at this time of year. Spring means the end of hibernating from the cold. The warmer days mean we can open windows and change the stuffy air in our houses. More sunlight and longer days energize us. In traditional Chinese five-element medicine, Spring is the season of the Wood element. On the physical, mental and spiritual levels, the Wood element is about vitality, flexibility, growth, purpose, direction, inspiration, the ability to plan and the ability to make decisions. Spring is a time of movement, bursting forth like a seed sprouting through the earth to grow. When we are balanced in our Wood element, it helps explain our need to clean things out and start fresh.

The Chinese five-element system is also one of the many feng shui tools used to change the energy of a space. If you are looking to adjust the energy of your room, with more than just cleaning and organizing, you may wish to look to the Wood element for some styling ideas. For colors consider blues, greens and teal. Keep nature in mind as you decorate. Bring in house plants. House plants are alive and their presence brings chi to a room. Also many plants such as pothos actually help to filter and clean the air.

If your aim is just a good cleaning, consider the following ideas to help get you there:

Many of us can get overwhelmed at the thought of a big cleaning job, so break your project down into more manageable tasks. You can set time limits. Decide you can commit to thirty minutes right now and do just that. You'll find coming back again later won't be so hard. There are resources for support like Marie Kondo and her book "The life-changing magic of tidying up". Ask for help if you need it - bring a friend in or hire someone.

Declutter before you clean, possibly organizing only one room at a time. Recognizing how you feel after one room is done can motivate you to continue throughout your house. Make a quick first pass in which you get rid of anything you immediately know is going to the trash, recycling or donation. Seeing the change that happens with this step can inspire and motivate you to continue. Have a small designated area where you place things that require more action or decision. When you are making decisions on letting go of things, think about if you will miss it when it is gone and also when you used it last. If it has been several months, maybe it is time to let go.

What you clean with is also important. Your cleaning products do not need to include toxic chemicals to do a good job. Giving yourself a headache from breathing nasty fumes is a negative reinforcement to the cleaning process. Baking soda and vinegar

can handle most jobs, and are easy on your body and your wallet. If you like to use ready-made products, choose as natural as possible. A product with a nice natural essential oil added (not a chemical fragrance) can actually help create a healthier, fresher smelling space.

Pay special attention to your beauty supplies when you clean out your bathroom. Make sure to get rid of anything you've been holding onto for years. Read the labels and check to see whether you still want to use a product that has ingredients you might not be familiar with or are unsure how healthy they are. You can always come to us for advice on better options.

Now that you have cleaned and decluttered, devise strategies to help keep it that way. Organizing storage spaces with the best containers for your purposes is very beneficial. Create good habits by keeping clutter from accumulating on a regular basis. An action becomes a habit once you repeat it enough times. Once something becomes a habit, it requires less energy to get through and is no longer work.

So why go to all the trouble of a good Spring cleaning and keeping things organized and neat? In talking about work spaces; researchers have found that people are more productive, better able to process information, and less distracted if their areas are kept neat and organized. Other studies have shown that messes are credited with negative impacts on focus.

Lastly, the act of cleaning itself can be very beneficial. You can turn cleaning into a moving meditation. Or you can listen to uplifting music or a good podcast to enhance the experience. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America advocates that the actual physical activity of cleaning along with the resultant cleaner space helps to reduce stress, feelings of anxiety and depressive symptoms - all good reasons to start your Spring with a good cleaning!

"Cleanliness is a mindset - a positive habit that keeps the body, mind and environment happy, healthy, simple, neat and delightful." - Amit Ray

"Everyone wants to save the Earth; no one wants to help mom do the dishes." - P.J. O'Rourke