

April 2020

Spring

HOME &

GARDEN

*Presented By*

The Malone Telegram

**Courier** Observer



# 10 ways to bond with your houseplants

By **LISA BOONE**

Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Now that we've been ordered to stay home, the surrealness of the global pandemic has set in. While many people are coming together virtually, now is a good time to tend to your houseplants. Does your *Dracaena* "lemon lime" need dusting? Is your Chinese evergreen getting too much sun? Are you watering your plants too much? Or not enough? Below, we offer some ways to cultivate your indoor garden, while helping you stay sane in the process. (Note: We know it's hard, but try to resist the urge to overwater your plants while you are stuck at home).

## 1. START STYLING WITH PLANTS

You know that table next to your bed? The one littered with bills, change and receipts for your income taxes? The first thing you see when you wake up in the morning and wonder what day it is in this ongoing pandemic? Put a plant on it. Trust us, it'll make you feel better. Take this time to tap into your inner Justina Blakeney or Hilton Carter. Try hanging plants from a curtain rod. Create a lush vignette on a bench or table top. Add a plant to your home office, whatever that might be right now. Plants add warmth and beauty to our interiors and can soothe our spirits as we ride out this quarantine.

## 2. RESEARCH A NEW PLANT

Treat yourself to a new houseplant. You deserve it. But before you do, make the most of your newfound time at home by doing some research to find the plant that's right for you. What kind of lighting conditions do you have at home? Do you normally travel, or do you spend a lot of time at home? You may need a low-maintenance houseplant.

## 3. BUILD A PLANTSHELF

Look it up on Instagram and Pinterest and you'll get the idea. Plant shelves are an aesthetically pleasing way to

add life to your interiors while calming your nerves. Many retailers offer creative and inexpensive ways to display plants such as the Satsumas bamboo and powder-coated metal stands from Ikea, an assortment that works well in small spaces and allows you to display multiple plants at once. (Remember, humidity-loving plants do better in groups.) Etsy also offers a variety of fun plant shelves and if you're feeling inspired, you can use this time to build your own.

## 4. PROPAGATE

Propagating houseplants, such as *Epipremnum aureum*, or pothos, is one of the easiest ways to clone your fa-

vorite houseplants. Simply cut the vine just below the node (where the leaf joins the stem), leaving two to three leaves at the top, and place several stems in water, or around the rim of a 3-inch pot. Allow the stems to stand in a warm area of the house and, eventually, rooting will occur. After three months, move each individual plant to a 3- or 4-inch pot. *Pilea peper-*

*mioides*, known as "the friendship plant" is another popular houseplant that is easy to propagate. Cut the "babies" that pop up at the base of the plant with a clean, sharp knife and place them in water. When new roots and leaves materialize, transfer the cutting to a small pot with well-drained potting soil. (These make great homemade hostess gifts when the

time comes to socialize again).

## 5. START AN INDOOR HERB GARDEN

Now that you're spending a lot more time cooking, why not plant some of your favorite culinary herbs, such as parsley, thyme and basil? Plant them in pots that are at least 8 inches

See **HOUSEPLANTS 10**



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# Seed companies face onslaught of orders amid virus

By ADRIAN HIGGINS

Washington Post

The best place to keep vegetable seed packets is in the refrigerator, where they are preserved and stored away from rodents and insects. But this habit comes at a price. I have several dozen half-used packets in the crisper, and there's no place for the salad greens.

Never mind, because this spring my pack-rat nature is rewarded. Buying fresh seed, while not impossible, is more complicated this year because of the coronavirus emergency.

In sum, there is a rush on seed buying as overnight homesteaders are either seeing the value of growing their own food or feel they are in a dystopia where their very existence depends on getting some beans to germinate. Or both.

The owners of seed companies I've talked to are a bit shell-shocked by the consumer frenzy, though they admit there are worse problems to have. They anticipate delays in filling online orders and the sellout of some varieties, but no across-the-board shortage. For those venturing out, retail seed racks may be depleted.

"It's the largest volume of orders we have seen," said Jere Gettle of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds in Mansfield, Mo. Peak seed-buying season for home gardeners is January to March, but the normal end-of-season decline in orders isn't happening.

Customers are gravitating to vegetables high in nutrients, such as kale, spinach and other quick-to-grow leafy greens. "Spinach is off the charts," said Jo-Anne van den Berg-Ohms of Kitchen Garden Seeds in Bantam, Connecticut.

The other top seller is the bean in all its forms. This is because beans are not only a healthy source of protein, but are also easy to grow and versatile. In the green stage, the pods and seeds are tasty. When left to ripen, the seeds form beans that can be stored and used for soups and casseroles.

Gettle said his company is handling approximately 4,500 orders daily, about twice the usual peak demand of spring. Swamped, he closed his website for three days



**Sales of seed of lettuce and other leafy greens are brisk as consumers turn to growing their own food amid the coronavirus emergency.** Rob Cardillo/W. Atlee Burpee & Co

and stopped taking phone orders to allow staff to catch up with the backlog. He may have to do so again if the volume persists, he said.

His family-owned seed company is known for its unusual heirloom vegetable varieties and has emphasized Asian vegetable varieties in recent years. More than a quarter of the offerings have been sold out. "In some cases, we can get more seed" for the current sales season, he said, "and in others, we cannot." Another challenge is the ability to get fresh seed packets printed as well as mailing supplies — such things as bubble wrap — now that the world has shifted to online ordering and home delivery.

"We are definitely seeing an increase in sales," said Jamie Matikow, chief executive and president of W. Atlee Burpee & Co. in Warminster, Pa. As with other retail seed companies, Burpee sells seed for herbs and annual flowers in addition to vegetables. "Online we are getting many more customers coming to us, and interest is skewed toward vegetables," he said.

Van den Berg-Ohms, of Kitchen Garden Seeds, said sales are up 40%. "More people are planting more varieties," she said. Varieties of vegetables and herbs that are directly sown into the garden, as opposed to started indoors first, "are really going crazy," she said.

Sales were already up noticeably in January, she said, but in the first week of March, "the incremental surge" started and has continued unabated.

The company, which specializes in gourmet varieties for home cooks, is able to meet demand, but some varieties may become

scarce or unavailable, she said. "At this point, we are just keeping up with it."

Such sales increases historically follow recessions as people seek to reduce grocery bills by growing their own food — seed sales jumped in 2009 after the Great Recession. Sudden unemployment is part of a new reality for millions of Americans as communities and states across the country have closed down to check the contagion.

Renee's Garden, a seed company in Felton, Calif., also sells online and through retail seed

racks. Its owner, Renee Shepherd, specializes in varieties developed for novices, the cook-gardener and urban dwellers — many are designed for container growing. The normal spring peak is around 350 orders daily; now, it's up to 2,000, she said.

"We are swamped. It's taking us four or five days" to fill orders, she said. "And normally, we would have more warehouse staff and have double shifts, but because of the [employee] safety measures, we can only do what we can do."

Seed companies obtain their stock from a web of sources, in-

cluding seed distributors and brokers and directly from contract growers. The seed farmers might be in a nearby field, the other side of North America or somewhere around the world, depending on the variety. Shepherd offers almost 1,000 varieties of vegetable, herb and flowers sourced from 50 companies. "It's more complicated for a company like Renee's, because we get a lot of seed from Europe," she said.

Some suppliers have reserves for immediate use, but some varieties will need another growing

See SEED 10



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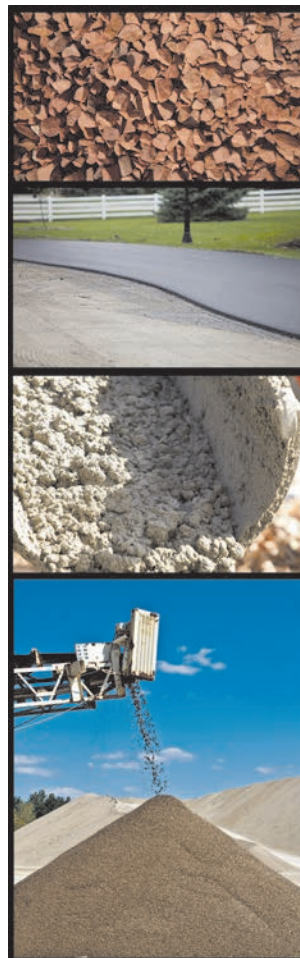
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# How to make spring projects more eco-friendly



Metro

The arrival of warmer weather means different things to different people. Some anticipate opportunities for outdoor fun, while others may be considering redecorating or remodeling their homes. For the latter group, home improvement season provides a great opportunity to make homes more eco-friendly.

When planning home improvement projects, it's best to first choose a project and then look for ways to make the project more environmentally friendly. Such an approach may not only benefit the environment, but it also may benefit homeowners' bottom lines.

## Interior decorating

Longer days and warmer temperatures often translate into wanting to freshen up the interior of a home. Heavy draperies and comforters are put away, and lighter fabrics are taken out of storage. Whenever possible, reuse or repurpose items you already have rather than purchasing new items. Longer drapes can be cut and hemmed to be used as window treatments in other rooms. Making a patchwork blanket out of old T-shirts is a crafty project that makes use of items that would otherwise be destined for landfills.

When laundering linens, skip the energy-using dryer and let

items line dry in the sun and fresh air.

If you decide to purchase some new items, look for products made from sustainable or organic fabrics. Hemp and bamboo textiles have grown in popularity. Hemp and bamboo plants grow quickly, and their durability makes these materials smart choices.

When replacing items around the house, donate older items to a charitable organization.

## Flowers and plants

Spring and summer call to mind beautiful blooming plants. Relying on native, sustainable plants is practical, environmentally friendly and cost-effective.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, sustainable plants are native plants. Native plants sustain local wildlife more effectively than non-native alternatives, so include native plants in your sustainable garden. Native plants also are less reliant on pesticides and herbicides to keep them healthy and viable.

Don't forget to bring plants indoors as well. Even though you may be opening the windows more, indoor plants can filter and purify indoor air. The NASA Clean Air Study, led in association with the Associated Landscape Contractors of

America, found that certain common indoor plants naturally remove toxic agents such as benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene from the air. Efficient air cleaning is accomplished with at least one plant per 100 square feet of home or office space.

## Proper disposal

Spring cleaning is another tradition for many families come the end of winter and dawn of spring. Many peo-

ple use spring as a time to go through closets and garages to remove items they no longer use or need. In an effort to clean up fast, some people may dispose of chemical products, paints, treated lumber, and many other items in ways that can be damaging to the environment. Always learn local municipal guidelines for proper disposal of potentially harmful products. Area recycling centers may have drop-off areas for stains and paints, used motor oil and other potentially harmful products.

Before discarding something, see if it can be donated or sold.

This will result in fewer items ending up in landfills.

Exercise caution outdoors as well. Runoff from cleaning products used on home siding or driveways can leach into the surrounding soil or find its way into sewage drains that ultimately direct fluids to public waterways. Choose environmentally responsible products whenever possible.

Springtime renovation and cleaning projects provide the perfect opportunity to adopt eco-friendly practices that pay dividends for years to come.

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# Container gardening tips

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Gardening is beneficial in various ways. The AARP states that some of the health perks associated with gardening include improved mood, increased vitamin D levels (which benefits bones and immune system) and reduced risk of dementia. In addition, if gardening efforts include growing herbs, fruits and vegetables, it can be a cost-effective way to eat healthy.

For gardeners without sufficient space or for those with mobility issues, container gardening can be an ideal way to grow everything from flowers to vegetables. Better Homes & Gardens says most plants are not fussy about the containers in which they grow so long as some of their basic needs are met. This means watering correctly for the type of plant, and ensuring sufficient drainage.

The following are some other ways container gardening efforts can prove successful.

- Watch water. Planet Natural Research Center says plants with thin leaves typically need ample water, and plants with thick leaves need less. Use this as a guideline to gauge water needs.

- Size correctly. Plants



should be sized to the container. Consider dwarf varieties of certain plants if your containers are small.

- Choose the right soil. Fill containers with a commercial potting soil rather than soil from the garden. Garden soil can dry into a solid mass, while commercial mixtures have amendments like peat moss, vermiculite, compost, and other ingredients to help with soil texture and moisture retention.

become waterlogged. Holes don't need to be large, but there should be enough of them so that excess water can drain out readily.

- Select the right container material. Container materials may be affected by gardeners' budgets, personal taste and

other factors. For those who live in hot climates, selecting a light-colored container can help prevent further soil heat absorption.

Container gardening is a healthy and enjoyable activity that can pay dividends in various ways.

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- Mix it up. When planting containers of flowers and other greenery, Good Housekeeping says to include 'a thriller, a spiller and a filler' as a good rule of thumb. The thriller is the focal point, the spiller a trailing plant, and a filler has smaller leaves or flowers to add bulk and color.

- Poke holes. Drainage holes are essential so that soil will not



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# Spring cleaning can alleviate allergies



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Allergies affect people of all ages. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology reports that allergic rhinitis affects between 10 and 30 percent of the world's population. In addition, the prevalence of allergic diseases has risen in industrialized nations for more than 50 years.

Seasonal allergies tend to be the strongest in spring and autumn. Allergies can be exacerbated by many factors, including in homes where improvements are being made. Regular housecleaning can remove many common allergy triggers and help alleviate symptoms. Knowing which common home improvement mistakes can aggravate allergies can help homeowners avoid them.

## Suit up

Before any cleaning begins, allergy sufferers should don face masks and rubber gloves to prevent themselves from breathing in allergens or having them touch their hands, where they can be transferred to the face or elsewhere. Those cleaning should also wear clothes that can be easily removed and laundered after a day's work.

## Clean windows singularly

Prolonged exposure to outdoor allergens, such as

pollen, mold or ragweed, can aggravate allergies. Therefore, if windows are being cleaned, do one at a time and then promptly close the

window. Having the air conditioning running can help filter the air as well.

## Use exhaust fans

The AAAAI recommends using an exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathrooms to reduce the levels of moisture in these rooms and filter out potential allergens and odors. Moisture can eventually lead to the growth of mold and mildew, which isn't healthy for anyone, including allergy sufferers, to breathe in.

## Invest in a HEPA filter

Vacuums with HEPA filters can trap allergens that are so small that they pass through regular vacuum filters. That means instead of containing them, these small particles are only being shot back into the air where they are easily breathed in. WebMD suggests vacuuming once or twice a week to keep carpets and floors as clean as possible.

ble. Plus, don't forget to vacuum upholstered furniture and drapes as well.

## Launder with hot water

When it comes time to wash linens, do so in hot water, which can kill dust mites

See ALLERGIES 9

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# Get your house clean with these powerwashing tips

Metro

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.



**Powerwashing the exterior of the home can be an effective way to clean it in the spring and fall.**

vestment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves,

eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-de-

gree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home's exterior.

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# Get ready: Early spring landscaping tips

Metro

During the cold months of winter, many people stare longingly out of the window dreaming of spring and time spent outdoors. For those with green thumbs, images of tending to the garden and other aspects of their landscapes no doubt dominate such daydreams.

Draw inspiration from those budding crocuses and daffodils pushing through the last remnants of snow and employ these tips to prepare for the upcoming gardening season.

■ One of the first steps is to apply a preemergent weed killer to get a head start knocking out weeds that can plague the lawn during the growing season. Killing weeds at the roots early on can mean far fewer hassles in spring and summer, and may prevent new generations of weeds from cropping up each year.

■ While it may be tempting to take a prematurely warm day as a sign that spring is in full force and purchase a bunch of annuals, it's better to know the last of the possible frost dates (check 'The Farm-



METRO

er's Almanac'); otherwise, you may waste time and money planting flowers or vegetables only to have them zapped by another frosty day.

■ Amend the soil so that it is the right consistency — just crumbling when lifting it. Soil that is too muddy after spring thaw can harden, making it difficult for plants to flourish later on. Speak with representatives at a local lawn and garden center about which types of amendments you can add to the soil in your particular

area to enrich it.

■ Lawn and garden experts at The Home Depot suggest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.

■ Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.

ed over the winter. Use a leaf blower to blow away any left-over leaves.

■ Check if the front porch, railings or decking need painting and/or staining. Tackle these projects when the weather is cooler so everything will be ready for those peak spring days.

■ Think about any annuals you might want to plant in the landscape this year that will complement any existing shrubbery or perennials. Come up with a theme so that the entire yard is cohesive.

Before homeowners know it, winter is gone and it is time to once again enjoy long days spent outdoors. Get a jump start on spring lawn prep as soon as you can.

■ Give outdoor entertaining spaces a good scrubbing, clearing away dirt and grime that may have accumulat-

## Did you know?

Metro

When planning spring landscapes, homeowners should always group plants with similar water needs together. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, grouping plants with similar water needs together helps to conserve water, which can be an especially useful strategy if or when drought restrictions go into effect in summer. Homeowners also can embrace additional strategies to landscape with water

conservation in mind. For example, aerating soil helps to improve water flow to plants' roots and reduces water runoff, helping to ensure that plants get all of the water they need while reducing the likelihood that homeowners will have to use excessive amounts of water to keep plants healthy. In addition, using low-water-using types of grass can help homeowners who live in areas prone to drought conserve water while still maintaining lush, green lawns.

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# Decor ideas to give homes a fresh look



Metro

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and that spirit of renewal can take hold inside a home.

Warm weather and longer hours of daylight make spring a perfect time to imagine a home's interior design in a new light. The following are a handful of decor ideas that may inspire homeowners

to give their homes an entirely new look this spring.

■ **Wallpaper:** Wallpaper fell out of favor years ago, but new styles that aren't so heavily patterned can make for wonderful additions to any room. Large-scale prints can give a room a whole new feel without giving homeowners or their guests the impression that they have

stepped back in time. A simple, mural-style floral wallpaper on the walls surrounding a table in a breakfast nook can bring nature inside.

■ **Pastel colors:** Nothing embodies the spring quite like pastel colors. If colorful, bright flowers dot the garden in the backyard, homeowners can bring those uplifting pastels inside by painting an accent wall or even adding some brightly colored accent furniture to rooms that could use a lift.

■ **Declutter:** Clutter is often conquered during spring cleaning sessions, but homeowners who want to create more free-flowing interior spaces can downsize their furniture and/or look for multipurpose features that make it hard for clutter to take over a room. Create more open space in entertaining areas by mounting the television and getting rid of a bulky entertainment center.

ter. Create even more space by replacing rarely used end tables with a storage ottoman where books and magazines can be stored to give a room a fresh, clean look.

■ **Accent features:** Sometimes the smallest changes to an interior space make the biggest impression. Replace dated accents like vases and table lamps with newer items

that reflect the latest styles and trends. Such adjustments won't break the bank, and they can give rooms a whole new feel.

Spring is a great time to reconsider home interiors. This spring homeowners can embrace various strategies, both big and small, to give their homes a whole new feel.

## Allergies

From 6

residing in sheets and blankets. Employ mattress covers to further protect against dust mite allergies.

### Shampoo smart

Shampooing a carpet may cause moisture to become trapped in the carpet fibers, leading to increased dust mites or mold growth. Spot-clean stains instead. Otherwise, hire a professional cleaner who will clean and dry the carpet as quickly as possible.

### Damp dusting is better

When cleaning up dust or home renovation debris, use a damp cloth or a vinegar solution to wipe down surfaces. This helps trap small particles instead of sending them into the air.

### Treat mold issues

Mold can trigger allergic reactions, so it is best to keep it out of a home. Solutions

that contain at least 10 percent bleach can be effective at killing mold, but it's best to prevent mold from growing entirely. That means keeping tabs of any moisture issues and addressing them

immediately.

Allergies can be problematic, but routine home cleaning in the right way can help alleviate symptoms.

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# Houseplants

From 2

in diameter, and place them in a south-facing kitchen window. You can propagate store-bought basil too. Cut below the leaf node, and place the stems in water. After several weeks, you should have a good root structure. Transfer the cuttings to a pot, or outdoors, and before long you will be in pesto heaven.

## 6. TRY A NEW LOCATION

Is your plant thriving in its current location? Does it need more sun, or less? Is it getting enough humidity? Now is a good time to observe what's going on with your houseplant. Are leaves turning brown or yellow, or falling off? Your plant may be unhappy. Try a new location and watch what happens.

## 7. DUST YOUR PLANTS

Houseplants collect a surprising amount of dust at home, especially if they live in the kitchen where they are exposed to cooking grease. Some experts advise wiping leaves clean with a damp cloth and giving them a bath in the sink or outdoors in the rain. Keeping plants clean helps with their overall health as it is a preventative measure against pests and insects.

## 8. GET CREATIVE WITH PRESENTATION

Find creative ways to have fun with your houseplants. Make a macrame plant hanger. Create a terrarium or fairy garden in a glass container — fishbowls, globes, pitchers or water glasses. You can add some lushness to your interiors by hanging a kokedama string garden — the Japanese art of growing plants in a moss-covered ball of soil wrapped with string or fishing line. You can even transform one of your empty candle containers into an up-cycled planter.

## 9. IS IT TIME TO REPOT?

Most plants need to be repotted at some point. To determine if your plant needs a new home, look to see if the roots are growing through the drain-



While many people are coming together virtually, now is a good time to tend to your houseplants. Pexels

age holes at the bottom of the pot. If it's a large plant, lay it on its side and tap the rim before running a knife around the inside. Water the plant before removing it and then transfer it to a pot that is about 2 inches larger than the previous planter.

## 10. ELEVATE YOUR

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# Seed

From 3

season to produce a harvest.

Shepherd has her own reserves for sales later in the year to gardeners in mild regions who want a second harvest in the fall. In the current tidal wave of orders, she now has to decide if she wants to dip into those.

Mattikow said Burpee replenishes stocks in retail seed racks, which are found in such places as hardware stores, gar-

den centers and grocery stores — businesses generally exempt from closure orders. For her rack sales, Shepherd said, “the big question is what will happen if they run out and we haven’t a clue how many stores will remain open by [April].”

Orders that may have taken a week to arrive will take longer, in part due to pressures on mail and parcel carriers.

“All of us are doing the best we can to catch up,” Shepherd said, “but people need to be patient.”

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# Beyond typical spring cleaning: 6 tasks you may have overlooked

**LOOK CLOSER:** Items you use every day need a deep cleaning, too

By ELIZABETH MAYHEW

Washington Post

Every March for the past 25 years or so, I have written articles and done television segments in which I give advice and instruction on how to spring-clean, but this year is different. In the age of the coronavirus, you don't need me to tell you to wipe down and disinfect your refrigerator handle, light switches and doorknobs; you're probably already doing those tasks and more.

With time at home, most of us are looking around wondering what else we can scour and scrub. I would hazard to guess that this will be the cleanest spring of record, but there's one thing that's important to stress: You need to clean, and disinfect as well. There is a difference between the two. Cleaning removes germs and dirt from surfaces, but it does not kill the germs; it just lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting kills the germs, but it does not clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. So, what you want to do is clean first, then disinfect. (The Environmental Protection Agency has a list of approved disinfectants for COVID-19 at [epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov).)

In my house, I have already done my typical spring cleaning of the windows, rugs and upholstery and cleaning and disinfecting of the refrigerator and toilet, but I am also tackling some other areas of my home that are often overlooked. You might want to do the same.

## IN THE KITCHEN

**Your dish rack:** Even though you place clean items on your dish rack, it can be a breeding ground for germs, because water drips from dishes and utensils into the crevices and bottom tray, which, if left to sit, can mildew and mold. To clean your dish rack, which I suggest doing every couple of days or so, separate all the parts (often the utensil holder and tray separate). Rinse all parts with hot water, then dip a toothbrush or scrub brush in distilled white vinegar and scrub all parts until mineral deposits, mold and/or mildew spots are gone. Continue to add more vinegar as needed. Rinse and air-dry.

**Your sink:** I am a stickler for disinfecting my sink nightly; I've never understood how people clean their dishes and then leave bits of food and grime in the sink! Clean your sink with soap and water, then spray a mist of distilled white vinegar followed by a mist of hydrogen peroxide, and let air-dry. (Don't mix the vinegar and hydrogen peroxide together; spray one after the other.)

**Your can opener:** I've seen too many people use a can opener and then just put it back in their utensil drawer. You should clean a can opener after every use, and not only the blade, but also the handles. Run it through the dishwasher or wash it with hot, soapy water, and allow it to air-dry fully before you put it back in a drawer.

**Your garbage can:** Completely empty your garbage

See TASKS 12



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# Tasks

From 11

can, making sure to remove any stuck-on food particles. Scrub both the interior and the exterior with hot, soapy water. Rinse with clean water, turn it upside down on a towel, and allow it to air-dry. You don't have to do this every time you take out the trash, but it's good to get in the habit of cleaning the can once a month. However, if you have a top with a handle, make sure to frequently disinfect it with a disinfecting wipe or wipe it down with a bleach solution. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommended recipe is one-third cup bleach per gallon of water or four teaspoons bleach per quart of water.) And to diminish garbage can odors, sprinkle baking soda on the bottom of the can before inserting a trash bag.

## IN THE BATHROOM

**Your toothbrush holder:** Your toothbrush holder is probably one of the germiest places in your home. I would clean it weekly — or as often as you clean your toilet. Rinse the toothbrush holder with hot water, then use a small bristle brush or pipe cleaner to scrub the inside of the toothbrush slots. Next, fill the holder with antibacterial mouthwash and let sit for several minutes. Rinse with clean water and let air-dry before reloading your toothbrushes.

**Your shower curtain liner:** Shower curtain liners typically harbor mold, especially at the bottom of the curtain, where you might not notice it. To clean the liner, remove it from the rings and put it in your washing machine with a half-cup of baking soda and a couple of towels. Run it through a normal cycle with warm water. The baking soda and towels work together, scrubbing the liner to get rid of the grime and soap buildup. Remove and let hang-dry. I suggest doing this every one to two months.

**Lastly, some general cleaning/disinfecting tips:** Always clean from top to bottom, so you let gravity do the work for you.

And it may sound like a lit-



tle thing, but it can help to add cleaning dates to your calendar or set phone reminders so you don't forget.

*Mayhew, a "Today" show style expert and former magazine editor, is the author of "Flip! for Decorating."*



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