KSL Studio 5
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"5 Cleanup Solutions for Your Home's Exterior"
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We spend time considering our housekeeping chores on the inside, but what needs to be done on the outside? Summer is a perfect time of year to tackle a few "exterior" housekeeping tasks. It's warm, the weather is workable, and it's rather nice to be outside anyway.

The following are some exterior cleaning tasks and easy homemade solutions for cleaning.

HARD WATER SPOTS ON WINDOWS

The number one exterior cleaning question we get at USU Extension this time of year is: "How do I get rid of hard water spots from the sprinklers off my windows??"

That is a tough one! The main thing to keep in mind with hard water buildup on windows it using something acid to breakdown the mineral(alkaline) deposit, and something mildly abrasive—something like baking soda, cornstarch, steel wool, OR a very mild cleanser. Products like Lime Away can also be used. Personally, I like toothpaste and the finest steel wool (or nylon dish scrubber) used in combination with the following solution.

Recipe for Cleaning Solution for Hard Water Spots:

1 cup water
1 cup vinegar

Combine and place in a spray bottle. Spray your problem windows with the solution and rub with 4 ought (0000)steel wool. Using a little of the above mentioned abrasives would not be a problem. There are also many other homemade cleaning solutions recipes—find one that works for you.

Now, once the window is clean, to help keep the water spots from building up so quickly, place a few drops of WD-40 on a rag and rub down the clean window. OR, place a few drops of fabric softener on a rag and rub down the clean window. OR, place a few drops of Jet Dry (for the dishwasher) on a rag and rub down the clean window. Any of these will help the water to sheet off the window. This doesn't last forever though, so reapply as needed.

WINDOW SCREENS

While you are in the process of cleaning your windows, might as well clean the screens while you are at it. It really is an easy task, and screens really do get dirty. Soak the screen up with a wet sponge and then dip the sponge in a cleaning solution and really suds up the screens. Then, place a rag on the ground and tap the window screen on the rag to get the soapy dirty water off. Rinse well and let dry before placing back on window.

Recipe for Screen Cleaning Solution:

2 Tbs. liquid dishwashing soap
1/4 cup ammonia
2 Tbs. borax
1 gallon water

VINYL SIDING

Vinyl siding is pretty maintenance free, but like anything exposed to the elements, in the course of a year, it will get dirty and need some cleaning.

Vinyl siding is designed to allow water falling from the sky (or high to low) to sheet off a home. It is not designed to handle water that is shot up from the ground. So to begin, always rinse off the siding pointing the hose down towards the ground. Never aim a hose up at vinyl siding as it can cause large amounts of water to seep behind the siding—causing rot, mildew, and mold.

The best way to clean vinyl siding is to rinse it down with a regular garden hose equipped with a nozzle. Set the nozzle to a medium misting spray. Never use a forceful direct stream of water, as it can penetrate behind the vinyl siding. There are many homes covered with vinyl siding that do not have waterproof membranes that cover the frame walls. The wood sheathing and framing lumber can get wet easily if you direct water at the edges of vinyl siding, or seams where two pieces of siding overlap, at inside and outside corners and next to windows and doors.

Getting Ready to Clean

• Cover any outside light fixtures or electrical outlets with plastic and secure the edges with tape.
• Give yourself room to work by moving all the patio furniture, your barbecue and any kids' toys well away from the house.
• You should also cover any shrubs or plants around the house with plastic sheets before you start cleaning. A quick word of warning –never leave plastic sheets over the plants too long in hot weather. The sheets will create a mini greenhouse underneath that could hurt or burn the plants.
• Check any particularly dark spots on the siding to determine if it's mold, mildew or dirt. Put a drop of household bleach on the dark spot. If it is mold it will turn white, plain old dirt will stay black.
• Get rid of any mildew using a mixture of 5 parts water to 1 part oxygen bleach. Oxygen bleach is better than chlorine bleach, since the oxygen won't damage plants or the soil the way chlorine bleach can.

Working with a hose and bucket

• Make your own cleaning solution.
• Start by spraying the wall with your garden hose and then use a long handled brush to apply your soapy mixture to the walls - make sure you start at the bottom and work your way up. (Hint -- You can get a great long handled brush for cleaning your siding at most RVdealerships).
• Work on one section of the wall at a time and once you've finished a section rinse it off (again starting at the bottom and working your way to the top—remembering to keep the nozzle pointing down).

While it is quite doable to use a power sprayer for this job, one must be very careful not to get water up underneath the siding. The method is similar to the steps just given, but care must be taken.

Recipe for a Cleaning Solution for Vinyl Siding:

1/3 cup powdered laundry detergent
2/3 cup TSP (trisodium phosphate)—available at home centers and janitorial supply stores

1 gallon of water

Note: The TSP can replaced with 2/3 cup borax. Do not use TSP if you have aluminum siding!!

CEMENT/CONCRETE--DRIVEWAYS, PATIOS, GARAGE FLOORS

Cleaning your concrete periodically and keeping it sealed are the key components of any good maintenance program. How often you clean and reseal will largely depend on the conditions the concrete is exposed to, especially weather extremes, sunlight intensity, and the amount of traffic and use.

Although water alone can remove dirt from concrete, cleaning agents are often needed to remove specific stains. Some folks recommend spraying the stain with the recommended cleaners and letting it sit for about 15 minutes before power-washing the area.

Oil and grease: Removal of oil from patios, drive-ways, and other concrete pavements is the most common concrete stain. In addition to hot water, an alkaline degreaser will greatly increase removal rates of oil and grease. Hot water lifts the oil from the concrete, and the degreaser emulsifies the oil, allowing it to be flushed from the surface. Some contractors use at least a little degreaser for most jobs, even to remove dirt, which can be somewhat oily. Alkaline cleaners are also the preferred chemical for cleaning soot and burn marks from concrete—after fireworks, sparklers, and fire crackers. An excellent alkaline cleaner that most of us have in our home is dishwasher detergent, but almost any degreasing hand dishwashing detergent will also work.

Recipe for a Cleaning Solution on Cement:

1 gallon water
½ cup borax
½ cup washing soda
1 TBS. liquid dish detergent or 2 TBS. dishwasher detergent

Rust: Heavy rust stains can penetrate deeply into concrete, so they can be tough to remove completely. I like to try getting rust out with citric acid first. Just wet the area with water and sprinkle some citric acid on the stains, then scrub. Cleaners containing oxalic acid or muratic acid are most effective—but must be used with caution, but depending on the rust stain, may require these stronger options.

WOOD DECKS

At least once a year, you should give your deck a thorough cleaning, following some version of the steps presented below. Additionally, you should treat your deck or reseal the wood at least once a year.

Preparing to Clean the Deck

• Remove everything from the deck, including furniture.
• Remove potted plants from the exterior perimeter of the deck.
• Lightly cover any delicate or fragile plants in the ground near the deck to protect them from potential disturbance.
• Gather together the tools that you will be using including brooms, dustpans, trash bags, long handled scrubbing brush with stiff bristles, hose with sprayer, pressure washer, and bucket.

Cleaning the Deck

• Begin by sweeping and removing any large debris by hand and place it in the trash bag.
• Remove any debris that is trapped in between the deck boards using a slender tool. Place the debris in the trash bag.
• Use the garden hose with a spraying attachment to spray the surface of the deck and rinse it clean. Use the highest or most powerful setting on the sprayer and direct it directly onto muddied or heavily soiled spots to remove as much of the dirt as possible. Begin at one end of the deck and continue until you have rinsed the entire thing. If you use a pressure washer to rinse the deck, leave a few feet in between the spray nozzle and the deck. If you hold the nozzle too closely to the deck, you will gouge the wood. Additionally, you should use the sprayer fan.
• Use the garden hose to spray in between the decking boards to clean away any remaining debris.
• Prepare a solution of sudsy water using the laundry detergent or read the instructions on the commercial cleaner.
• Apply whatever you are using for a cleaner to the deck. Use a long handled brush with stiff bristles or a push broom to scrub the deck. Begin at one end of the deck and work your way to the entire deck.
• Rinse the entire deck with the garden hose to remove the cleaning solution.
• For difficult areas to clean, you will need to take further steps. Areas that have some algae or mildew growth will need to be treated with a solution of one part bleach to four parts water. Be careful not to spill the bleach onto your clothing or any plants since it is harmful. Use plastic or garden gloves to protect your hands if you have delicate skin. Pour the solution onto the area with the growth. If the growth appears fresh, then allow the solution to sit for only a moment or two. If on the other hand, the growth appears to have been there for a while, allow the bleach solution to sit for about fifteen minutes. Use the long handled brush with stiff bristles or the push broom to scrub the area. Rinse the area clean. Allow it to dry.
• If a stain remains on the deck after the first cleaning, then you will need to repeat the process. It is best to allow the area to dry completely before treating it again and to scrub the area for the fifteen minutes that the solution is on it.
• Thoroughly rinse the deck with the garden hose or pressure washer. Allow the deck to dry completely before sealing it. This may take as long as two or three full days.

Recipe for Deck Cleaning Solution:

1 gallon water
3 TBS. liquid dish detergent
2 cups bleach
1 cup rubbing alcohol

The bleach solution may lighten the color of the deck, so you can use an oxygen bleach cleaner to make the cleaning solution if you prefer.
Note: Never mix ammonia with bleach!

RAIN GUTTERS

During a rainstorm, gutters route runoff from a very large surface—your home's roof--to where it can drain away from the house. By doing so, they protect siding, windows, doors, and foundations from water damage and help prevent flooding in basements.

To do that, the gutters and downspouts need to be clear of leaves and other debris. If they aren't, drain outlets will dam up and rainwater will fill the gutters, back up, overflow, and eventually pull gutters loose from their mountings.

You can hire a service to clean your gutters, but doing the work yourself can save you $100 or more.

Plan to clean gutters at least once, if not twice a year--more often if the roof is directly beneath trees. But only take on

this task if you know you can work safely from a ladder or the roof. If your roof is higher than a single story, or you're unsure of your job's safety, you're better off hiring a professional.

1) Scoop out loose debris

Starting at a drain outlet at the low end of a gutter, use a narrow garden trowel to scoop out loose debris, working away from drain outlet. It's usually easiest to do this when the debris is slightly damp and pliable, not soggy or dried and encrusted. To minimize cleanup later, you can scoop the debris into a plastic garbage bag.

2) Blast out the gutters with a hose

Using an on-off high-pressure nozzle mounted at the end of a water hose, wash out each length of gutter, working toward the drain outlet. This can be a messy job; try to avoid splattering mud all over your house. If necessary, use a stiff scrub brush to break loose encrusted dirt.

3) Clear obstructions in drainpipes

If water doesn't drain freely through drainpipes, try flushing debris down them with the hose. If that doesn't work, use a plumber's auger (snake) to free and pull out debris from the bottom.