



Healthy spring cleaning...

beyond the broom

Ah... spring! The sun shines longer each day, the grass is slowly turning green, and the flowers are beginning to bloom. After a good Canadian winter, nature seems to refresh itself.

We help with the outdoors clean up by raking the lawn and picking up litter, happy to be outside, enjoying the warmth of a new season.

Soon, our thoughts turn to cleaning up the inside of our homes. But do we really give it a good refresh?

Maybe this year, we could do more than just mop the floors. Healthy spring-cleaning can be healthy for us and healthy for the environment at the same time.

In your home

Cleaning products

Be sure to read all product warning labels and ingredients and follow directions. When certain cleaning products are used together, they can be more hazardous than when used separately. For example, a toxic gas forms when ammonia and bleach are combined. Always make sure you have proper ventilation when using a product (such as open windows for air circulation).

Sometimes the 'little' things can really add up to something big...

Ten things you can do to help conserve energy and protect the environment without spending a dime (but you may save a few!)

1. When using the stove, keep the lids on your pots. The lid will help the pot and the contents stay hotter - which lets you turn down the heat setting.
2. Use your small appliance when ever possible - such as your kettle, microwave, or toaster oven. Microwave ovens use up to 75% less energy when compared to a stove or oven.
3. Use a clothesline to dry your laundry. This option works well in the summer, but if you have the room, try setting up a drying or hanging rack in the house as well. Clothes will generally dry overnight during the winter when the furnace is on.
4. Wear your slippers! You will feel colder if your feet are cold so dig out those slippers before you turn up the furnace.
5. Use ceiling fans to help, or even instead of, your air conditioner - ceiling fans generally use very little electricity. Make sure your fan is blowing air downwards in summer.

You can also try [home-made cleaners](#) and see if they do the job. Many are safe alternatives to the ones purchased in the store. For example: for an All-Purpose Cleanser, mix a ½ cup of pure soap (or soap flakes) with a ¼ cup of lemon juice and 1 gallon of hot water.

Find some strange looking black spots?

While you are cleaning the house, keep an eye out for any signs of water damage (staining or dampness) and for "unusual" dirt or grime. It might be mould. Mould can grow on almost anything and be a source of serious [indoor air quality \(IAQ\) problems](#). Moulds will most often appear as dark spots, stains or patches.

If you find a suspicious spot, you can do a check to see if it is mould or fungi by dabbing the spot with a small amount of chlorine bleach. If the colour changes or disappears, the stain is "likely organic and probably mould" (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 2004)

What to do if you find mould

1. **Throw it out if you can.** If the spot is on something that you can throw out (blanket, piece of carpet, wood), it is best to just throw it out.
2. **Clean it carefully.** If the spot is small, you can clean it by using a "bleach cleanser" of one-part bleach to four-parts water (1:4 ratio) and a small amount of a non-ammonia based dishwashing detergent to cut surface dirt. **NEVER mix chlorine bleach and ammonia!**

Identify and remove the source. Be sure that the source of the water is identified and corrected.

6. In the summer, use your blinds and curtains to keep the heat from the sun "out" and from over heating your house or apartment.
7. Don't overfill the refrigerator as this blocks air circulation and reduces its efficiency. Your freezer on the other hand, works best when it is full.
8. Most lawns only need about 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water once per week and you can skip a week after a good rain. To measure, place an empty tuna can on the lawn. See what Mother Nature has provided before you turn on the sprinkler. When the water level reaches the top of the can, your lawn has had enough to drink.
9. While the water hose is usually more fun, use a mop and bucket - or a broom - to remove dirt from driveways, decks and patios.
10. Recycle, recycle, recycle. Most municipalities offer a wide range of items that can be recycled that is beyond glass and paper. Check to see what plastics and yard wastes can be collected.

(Adapted from the [Ontario Ministry of Energy](#) and [Earth Day Canada](#))

In the yard

What are you standing on?

Check your deck or children's play equipment. What is it made of? Wood that is "pressure treated" is often chromated copper arsenate (CCA) treated wood. Studies suggest that arsenic (arsenate) over time can slowly leach from CCA-treated wood.

Arsenic in the wood

According to Health Canada "the amount and rate at which arsenic leaches depends on many factors including amount of rain, soil in contact with the wood, and the age of the structure. In general, the concentration of arsenic in soil leached from treated wood decreases quickly within a short distance from the treated wood."

The concern centres around the fact that in large doses, arsenic has been associated with cancer. It is not known exactly how small amounts of arsenic can affect humans over a long period of time. Also of concern is that children may be exposed to trace amounts of arsenic when they play on and touch the wood and then put their hands in their mouths.

What you can do

Parents should encourage their children to follow basic "good hygiene" practices such as washing hands thoroughly after activities involving contact with various surfaces/materials including treated wood, animals and soil, especially before eating and drinking. If a picnic table is made of pressure treated wood, use a table-cloth to reduce the contact with food.

If you are thinking about building a new deck, consider using cedar or redwood as these woods are naturally resistant to decay and rot. You can treat your existing deck with a "penetrating coating" (e.g., oil-based, semi-transparent stains) on a regular basis (e.g., once a year or every other year depending upon wear and weathering).

For more information, please see the Health Canada [fact sheet](#) on chromated copper arsenate (CCA) treated wood.

What are you walking on?

While lawns are many people's pride and joy, be careful about what you use on them. The word "pesticide" is a general term used to describe a substance (or mixture) that kills a pest, or prevents/reduces the damage a pest may cause. Pests can be insects, mice or other animals, unwanted plants (weeds), fungi, bacteria or viruses. Pesticides are usually chemicals, but they can also be made from natural materials such as animals, plants, bacteria, etc. Care should be used when choosing or using these products. Because pesticides can "kill", they can also affect humans or other animals (such as family pets).

Pesticides may also come dissolved in "carriers" (other chemicals) which can have their own toxicity concerns. Always evaluate the potential health hazards of the product as a whole, rather than just the pesticide or active ingredient. In general, the risk of illness increases as the concentration (strength) of the pesticide, and duration (length) of exposure increases. "How much: and "how long" is necessary to cause illness will depend on the type of pesticide.

The best way to reduce your need for pesticides is to have a healthy lawn. Yes, believe it or not, a healthy lawn will require very little pesticide use, if any.

Steps to a healthy lawn:

- Feed your lawn with compost and leave grass clippings on the lawn for nutrient recycling.
- If the soil is compacted, aerate in the fall. Breaking up the lawn and soil helps oxygen, water, and nutrients reach the roots.
- Mow "high" to promote vigorous growth, prevent weeds and discourage insect pests.
- Water deeply but only infrequently to promote deep roots. Too much water starves the soil of oxygen and invites disease.

(from Health Canada's [Healthy Lawns](#))

If you must work with and store pesticides, please use them safely. The importance of reading the label and following instructions carefully cannot be overemphasized.

Safe use of pesticides for your lawn

- ◆ Use alternative methods or products when ever possible.
- ◆ Use the right pesticide for the job. Make sure the label lists the pest you wish to control.
- ◆ Always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as recommended on the label, Material Safety Data Sheet or technical information sheet. PPE may include coveralls, long pants, long sleeved shirts, gloves, boots, goggles or face shield, hat, and respirator.
- ◆ Wash hands and face after working with the pesticide, and always before eating, smoking, using the toilet, or leaving for the day.
- ◆ Change your clothes after applying the pesticide. Wash your clothes before wearing them again.
- ◆ Leather boots, shoes, belts, watch bands or jackets splashed with pesticides cannot be decontaminated and must be discarded.
- ◆ Keep the label "intact" and make sure it is readable.

(From: [Handbook for Pesticide Applicators and Dispensers](#), 5th edition, BC Govt Publications. Please see References for more information.)

In your neighborhood

Conserve energy

Conservation is becoming more and more important. Sometimes, it is hard to imagine how one person making a few small changes can have an effect, but every step really does help.

Try these tips!

Replace regular light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs in your lamps and ceiling lights. Compact fluorescent bulbs are becoming more reasonable in price - but if the cost still is too much, start with the two or three lights that you use the most. These bulbs use 75% less electricity and last years longer. One compact fluorescent bulb can save you three times its cost in electricity.

- **For outside lighting, install a motion sensor** that turns the lights on automatically when somebody walks by, and then turns the lights off automatically after 1 to 5 minutes.
- **Walk to the corner store instead of driving.** If you are waiting in your car for someone to come back out with the milk, be sure to turn your car off.
- **Plant a tree!!** Plant leafy (deciduous) trees on the sunny side of your house. During the summer they provide shade, and in the winter they will shed their leaves to let the warming sunshine through. Pine or fir trees on the north side provide an energy-saving windbreak.

Don't keep that old, inefficient refrigerator running in the basement for the occasional cold drink. It could cost you \$150 or more per year in electricity.

(Adapted from the [Ontario Ministry of Energy](#) and [Earth Day Canada](#))

This spring, let's follow nature's example. A healthy clean-up for your home means a healthier world for us all.

Resources/References

[Energy Saving Tips](#)

From the Ontario Ministry of Energy

[Indoor Air Quality - Moulds and Fungi](#)

From: CCOHS

[Building, Renovating and Maintaining \(various topics\)](#)

From Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

[Questions & Answers on Backyard Playground Safety](#)

From: SafeKids Canada

Date published: April 15, 2004

This article was prepared by the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) (CCOHS), the CHN [Workplace Health](#) Affiliate.