

SPRING Home & Garden

Put some spring in your cleaning step

Spring is the season of nature's rebirth. Trees and flowers begin to bloom anew each spring, and young animals can be seen frolicking with their parents. During a time when it seems like the entire planet gets a refresh, many homeowners turn their thoughts to refreshing their homes as well.

As the days lengthen and the weather warms, spring cleaning takes center stage. Spring cleaning is more extensive than simply washing away grime, as cleaning a home often offers a psychological reset for the coming months. A clear strategy can make the task of spring cleaning feel less daunting, and these tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen

after months spent indoors.

Declutter before cleaning

The rule of thumb when starting on spring cleaning is to combat clutter before cleaning. Trying to clean around clutter is inefficient and may result in throwing in the towel prematurely. It is important to remove as much as possible from each room before you begin cleaning. As homeowners move through each room, they can assess whether they've used items in the last year or whether they serve any functional or aesthetic purposes. If not, they can be trashed or donated.

Move top to bottom

It's important to follow the rules of science when spring cleaning. That means that dust and debris

will be affected by gravity. Engaging in a top-down approach will help make cleaning more efficient. Beginning at the ceiling and working down towards the floors will help people avoid having to clean the same surface twice.

Using a duster or a microfiber cloth, individuals can clear cobwebs from corners and dust from crown molding. Fingerprints will accumulate near light switches and door handles, so those areas should be wiped down, too.

Homeowners can conduct a thorough cleaning of heating and cooling output and intake vents as they likely have gathered dust over the winter. A down of floor moldings

can get to any area near the floor or under furniture that doesn't get frequent cleaning.

Do a kitchen reset

Focusing attention on the kitchen, which tends to be the busiest room in the house, is a wise idea for spring cleaning plans. This is the time for individuals to pull everything out of the refrigerator and pantry and check for expiration dates. Wiping down the shelves means cleaning away any accumulated food drips or spills. Additional areas to consider include behind the refrigerator, inside the dishwasher filter and inside the microwave.

Focus on air quality

It's key to replace the HVAC system filters come



SPRING CLEANING. These tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen after months spent indoors.

springtime, as well as any air purifiers in the home. This will help reduce allergens and ensure that the cooling system will run efficiently when it's time to turn it on.

Spring cleaning takes place each year. Prioritizing decluttering and following a systematic path through the home helps people eliminate stress and mess at the same time.

What are those bags hanging on my evergreen trees?

Bagworms (*Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*) are a common landscape pest that you see on many evergreen ornamental plants. Most often they are found on arborvitae, spruce, juniper, cedar, and Leyland cypress. They are easily identified by their cone-shaped bag they spin from silk, parts of the host plant, and other debris. In late summer dark brown pupae about 1/2 inch to 2 inches long can be found in these bags. Adult female bagworms are wingless, legless, grub-like, and they

never leave the bag. Males are small, brown, hairy moths with dark wings that clear with age.

In the fall the females lay 500-1000 eggs in their bag before they die. The eggs overwinter and hatch in May and June. When the larvae hatch, they are blown around by the spring winds and land on a suitable host. The worm then spins a tiny bag of silk and plant debris that looks like an upside-down ice cream cone. As the caterpillar grows the bag grows as more host plant material is added to the outside for camouflage. In August the caterpillars mature and molt into the pupal stage. During August and September adult bagworms emerge as moths. Since adult females are wingless, they never leave the bag. The males leave the bags in search of females for mating.

New bagworm infestations often go unnoticed until late summer after the damage is done. Once conifers are damaged, they



do not produce new foliage. The key for monitoring bagworms is to look for bags in the fall or early spring before eggs hatch. Intervention and control of bagworms is possible,

but as mentioned monitoring is critical. Since females do not fly, infestations can be concentrated and localized in your landscape.

There are many different types of parasitic wasps that can aid in controlling bagworms as well as a number of insecticides. The following are some of the most available insecticide ingredients for control: bifenthrin, spinosad, bacillus thuringiensis, acephate, and cyfluthrin. The best time to use these insecti-

cides would be in late May and June. It is too late to spray in the fall once the bags are formed. Bags can also be removed by hand and destroyed if heavily concentrated in one area. If left uncontrolled bagworm populations can become severe enough to kill large

deciduous trees. For more information about bagworms, or if you have other gardening questions, feel free to contact the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office at 919-496-3344, or visit our website at franklin.ces.ncsu.edu.



Bagworm casing in an evergreen tree

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A rundown on countertops

Kitchen renovations continue to top the list of improvements that offer a high rate of return on investment. Buyers pay attention to kitchens, which undoubtedly affects the ROI of kitchen renovations. According to the Journal of Light Construction's "Cost vs. Value Report 2025," a minor kitchen remodel offers an ROI of 113 percent, while a midrange remodel offers an ROI of 51 percent. Replacing a kitchen countertop can help homeowners see improvements to the functionality of their spaces and improve the value of their homes.

According to data from Grand View Research, the U.S. countertops market is projected to reach \$35.57 billion in 2026, driven by homeowners who desire high-value renovations over relocating. Those thinking about overhauling their spaces with new countertops can consider the leading materials and how they rank in cost, maintenance and durability.



COUNTER CHOICES. Those thinking about overhauling their spaces with new countertops can consider the leading materials and how they rank in cost, maintenance and durability.

Engineered quartz
The National Kitchen & Bath Association reports that 78 percent of design professionals expect quartz to be the preferred countertop material over the next several years. Quartz is non-porous, so it will resist stains, scratches and bacteria infiltration without having to be sealed. Unlike natural stone, quartz offers

pattern uniformity, which makes it easier to map out seamless transitions. Quartz costs between \$50 and \$150 per square foot installed.

Granite
Granite still holds a considerable chunk of the countertops market and remains a solid standard for those who value a one-of-a-kind look of nat-

ural stone. Granite has exceptional heat resistance and adds significant resale value. However, it requires periodic sealing to maintain its good looks. Costs range from \$40 to \$190 per square foot.

Porcelain
Porcelain tiles and slabs are projected to become the fastest-growing segment in the ceramic tiles

market, according to reports from Yahoo Finance. High-precision printing technology enables porcelain to mimic rare marble and other stone with superior accuracy. Porcelain is even harder than granite and effectively impervious to UV rays. This makes the material a solid choice for outdoor kitchens. Plus, at a cost of \$60 to \$120 per square foot, it is competitive with other similar materials.

Butcher block

Those who appreciate a soft, organic texture and "warmth" in their spaces can look to butcher block. Wood is making a comeback, as many homeowners are moving away from stark, white designs. Butcher block is self-healing, meaning scratches can be sanded out. Butcher block costs between \$50 and \$150 per square foot.

Laminate

Laminate is a budget-friendly option for homeowners at \$20 to \$80 per square foot, but is not as durable as other materials. Some laminates mimic the look of high-end materials, and they don't require much maintenance.

Countertops affect the look and feel of kitchens and other interior and exterior spaces. Choosing materials comes down to cost, durability and maintenance.



What are all those holes in the ground coming from?

Charles Mitchell
Franklin County Cooperative Extension Director

They are most likely the solitary bees such as the "colletids" and "andrenids" that often emerge in the spring of year. Even with the cooler weather we've experienced, rain that has softened the soil (for digging purposes) and open/exposed areas warm more quickly contributing to this burst of activity. The bees begin foraging for food and seeking out new nesting sites. This activity can continue through June. They dig vertical tunnels in the soil on which they make small side chambers that they store pollen for their offspring.

These bees are "solitary" which means there is not a true colony. A lot of the "swarming" that you see is males and females. The bees frequently make small mounds in the soil, often where the soil is loose and vegetation may be sparse. You frequently see clusters of these nests, but they are all made by individual queens that do the work without the help of workers, as occurs in a honeybee nest. Although the damage can be unsightly with large numbers of mounds in the yard, it is mostly a cosmetic issue. The bigger problem is usually that people walking by panic because

they assume that these are swarms of honey bees (or a similar bee) that will likely attack them if they venture too close to 'the nest'. Turf-nesting bees can sting but rarely do so, since they are not "social" and you do not have a large number of worker bees that are trying to protect a nest. There is no "mass attack" as might occasionally occur with a close encounter of the yellow jacket kind. These bees are beneficial and should be left alone if possible.

If the bees try to nest in a sandbox, a simple solution is to cover it during the day but it will take a few weeks for you to deter most of the bees that show up over time. While the tarp approach isn't always successful, wider areas can be saturated with plain or soapy water that will bring the bees out. Since soap will work as an insecticide to some extent, it may kill some of the bees in the process, but still consider this preferable over the use of conventional insecticides. The waterlogged soils will hopefully deter the bees but again we're looking at activity that can take place over a few weeks.

If you have further questions about insects in the landscape do not hesitate to call your local Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office at 919-496-3344. You can also visit our website at franklin.ces.ncsu.edu.

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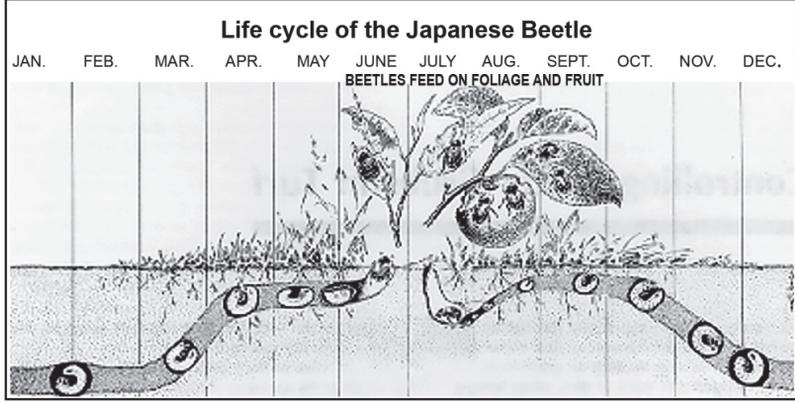
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Are white grubs creating problems in your yard?

White grubs are turf pests found throughout North Carolina. It is not uncommon to find 10 or more grubs per square foot feeding on grass roots. Heavily infested turf wilts or dies, often leaving the lawn feeling soft and spongy. Grubs may feed for several months before any turf damage becomes visible. Severely damaged turf may be rolled back like a carpet because its root system has been destroyed. Because of their underground feeding habits, white grubs are more difficult to detect and control than many of the pests that feed above ground. If they are promptly detected and identified, they can be controlled through treatments applied at the appropriate time. Outlined in this guide are proper scouting procedures for detecting grub infestations and guidelines for timing insecticide applications.

White grubs are the larvae of scarab beetles. The grubs of economic importance in North Carolina are those of the Japanese beetle, the green June beetle, the southern masked chafer, the northern masked chafer, and the Asiatic garden beetle. Several other species, such as May beetles and June beetles, are also present but usually in low numbers. The Japanese beetle is consistently the most damaging grub in this state. All these grubs have cream-colored bodies with yellow to brownish heads, brownish hind parts, and six legs. Mature grubs vary



Charles Mitchell
Franklin County Cooperative Extension Director

in length from 1/4 to 1-1/2 inches, depending on the species. White grubs usually lie in a curled or C-shaped position.

White grubs can be controlled in a timely and economical manner if proper controls are correctly applied at the right time. To prevent serious damage, examine all turf in April and again in August for the presence of grubs. Do not wait for brown patches to appear in the turf before inspecting the soil. Birds, moles, skunks and raccoons all feed to some extent on grubs, and their digging in the lawn may be a sign of a white grub infestation. However, it is best to verify that grubs are actually present before applying pesticides. Use a heavy-duty knife or a spade to cut a 1-square-foot flap of sod and roll it back. Examine the soil and roots in the top 3 or 4 inches. Repeat this process in several locations. If you find an average of five or more grubs per square foot, a pesticide application is justified.

A biological treatment method, useful against only Japanese beetle grubs, is the application of milky spore bacteria. This commercially available bacteria, when

applied to the soil, infects the grubs and produces a disease. Grubs in the soil come in contact with the spores through ingestion. The spores germinate inside the grubs, eventually killing them. These spores work best when applied in late September or early October to soil with a pH level between 6 and 7. The results are not as rapid as with chemical insecticides, but the effects last many years. When milky spore disease becomes established, it will spread naturally to adjoining, untreated areas.

The timing of the insecticide application is critical if control is to be effective. There are two approaches, preventative and curative. Some of the newer products are preventative, and are most effective when applied prior to when the eggs are laid. The best time to apply curative insecticides is when the grubs are actively feeding near the soil surface. Pesticides applied any other time will be ineffective. As indicated in the life cycle chart below, this feeding occurs from August through October, and again in April through early May. Curative treatments applied in late summer or fall are usually more effective than spring applications because the grubs are small.

If you have questions about grubs or other gardening questions, contact your local Cooperative Extension office at 919-496-3344.

Make your laundry room a more functional space

Functionality is important when designing the interior spaces in a home. Homeowners who redesign their interior spaces can emphasize functionality to help reduce clutter and create a more efficient and even calming space.

Laundry rooms may not be the most glamorous rooms in a home, but they do get lots of usage, particularly in homes with children. Because laundry rooms tend to be well trafficked areas, it makes sense for homeowners to make them as functional and user-friendly as possible. With that in mind, homeowners can consider these tips to make laundry rooms more functional spaces.

- Purchase laundry pedestals with storage capacity. Laundry pedestals make useful additions to a laundry room. Many homeowners place their washing machines and dryers on top of pedestals with storage drawers, which can be used to store everything from dryer sheets to clothes irons to stain removal kits. Pedestals can be particularly useful in cramped laundry rooms where the only means to adding storage is to go up and not out.
- Install a freestanding laundry sink. A laundry sink also adds function to a laundry room by enabling homeowners to hand wash certain clothes and apply stain removal products in the same space where the rest of their clothes are being cleaned. Installing a laundry sink is a relatively inexpensive job, but the cost may go up if new plumbing, venting or electrical work is necessary.
- Add a countertop work space. If you already have ample storage and won't be placing the washer or dryer atop a laundry pedestal, then installing some countertop



USER FRIENDLY. Homeowners can consider these tips to make laundry rooms more functional spaces.

above the appliances can add function and aesthetic appeal. A countertop workspace above a dryer provides an accessible space to fold laundry the moment it dries, reducing the likelihood that clothes will become wrinkled and ensuring you won't put off folding.

- Install floating shelves. Floating shelves won't cost a lot of money, but they can be ideal in cramped laundry rooms. Shelves provide a space to store detergent and other items that may not fit inside laundry pedestals, including baskets.

- Add hanging storage. Some articles of clothing should not be dried in a dryer for fear of shrinking the fabric or destroying the item. In such instances, some readily accessible hanging storage capacity can make the laundry room more functional. Items can be hung on hangers or over a hanging rack suspended from the ceiling if space is minimal.

Laundry rooms are heavily used spaces in a home, so it makes sense to take steps to make these areas as functional as possible.

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Deciding if a sunroom right for you?

There is no denying the appeal of a sunroom. Sunrooms bring more of the outdoors inside by bridging the gap between home and yard. Demand is shifting, with more than 61 percent of homeowners now preferring four-season insulated rooms for year-round use, according to Market Reports World. A sunroom has the potential to offer a roughly 50 percent return on investment and can cost anywhere from \$22,000 to \$72,000 on average.

A sunroom addition is a significant investment and a decision not to take lightly, as it changes both the interior floor plan and backyard space. To decide if a sunroom really is a worthwhile

endeavor, it's important for homeowners to consider the footprint of their homes/yards, how they plan to use the space, and the amount of sun the home receives.

Home footprint

Professionals with the National Association of Realtors say that a sunroom should not consume more than 30 percent of the remaining backyard and urge homeowners to avoid overdeveloping a lot. If installing a sunroom will leave a homeowner with only a small patch of yard afterwards, the result can feel heavy and unbalanced. It also won't match the neighborhood. Another consideration is the local zon-

ing ordinances where a person lives. The City of Los Angeles, for example, warns that most towns require a setback between the sunroom structure and the property line. It's also important to look at the home's roof and whether or not the sunroom will fall right under the eaves or if it will require an expensive tie-in to the existing roof.

Utility

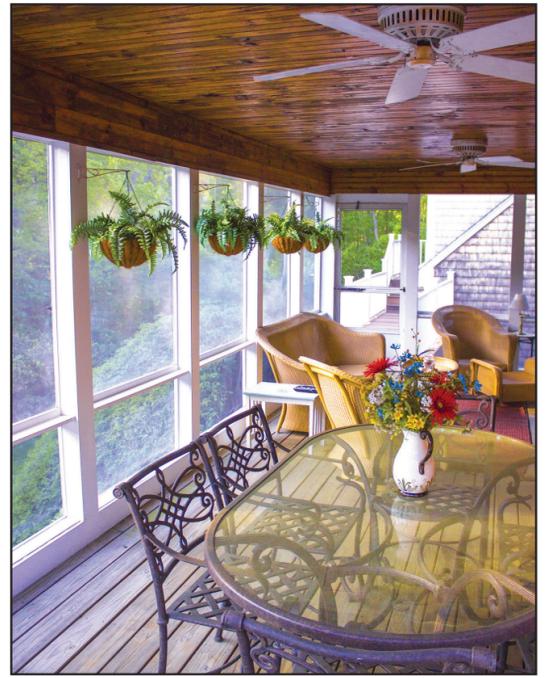
It is vital that homeowners determine how they will use the space and when. This will dictate the type of sunroom that should be built. A three-season room is typically uninsulated with only single-pane glass. This is ideal if someone is looking for a screened-in

retreat without all of the bugs and a little weather protection. Four-season rooms are fully insulated and tie into a home's HVAC system. This space will be functional all year long, but it is a more expensive undertaking as well.

Light evaluation

The purpose of a sunroom is to benefit from the sun. The value of the space will depend entirely on which way the room faces. North-facing sunrooms have soft light with minimal heat or glare that likely can be used all day. Morning people can appreciate an east-facing sunroom while drinking coffee or reading, and the space will cool down in the afternoon. South-facing rooms will be bright most of the day and may need high-end HVAC hookups or shades to stay comfortable, even in cooler months. West-facing sunrooms are great for watching sunsets, but the hot afternoon sun must be considered. UV-rated glass to prevent floor fading and even sunburn likely will be needed.

It is important to work with a company that specializes in sunrooms. Such firms are experienced in helping homeowners design and ul-



ADDING A SUNROOM? To decide if a sunroom really is a worthwhile endeavor, it's important for homeowners to consider the footprint of their homes/yards, how they plan to use the space, and the amount of sun the home receives.

timately build these spaces to avoid common pitfalls, advises Champion, a window, sunroom and home exterior company.

In general, a sunroom is not a DIY project since it typically involves a major structural change. It can be a viable addition to a home when built correctly to remain durable through every season.

What is the 3-5-7 rule?

Home design trends come and go, but one that has inspired a legion of committed

followers is the 3-5-7 rule. The 3-5-7 rule is a formula for interior decorating that encour-

ages homeowners to group furnishings in odd numbers. The intention behind such groupings is to ensure homes feel balanced and intentional without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. Adherents to the 3-5-7 rule feel that odd-numbered groupings allow for an ideal blend of scale and height that creates a natural rhythm within interior spaces. Some even insist that odd groupings appear more curated. Size can come into play when pivoting to the 3-5-7 approach to interior design. Three large furnishings can be arranged (i.e., sofa, area rug and a large piece of wall art), five mid-sized items (chairs, coffee table, etc.) and seven small pieces (candles, framed photos, etc.).



3-5-7 RULE. Home design trends come and go, but one that has inspired a legion of committed followers is the 3-5-7 rule.

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