



Spring Clean Your Gardens & Farm

Here's a checklist to get you started on cleaning your gardens, barn and outbuildings—and get them ready for the growing season.

By Amy Grisak

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What to Wear: Garden Garb Take advantage of a warm spring day to prepare for the busy season ahead. It's time to pull on your boots, grab the broom and the rake, and make a fresh start.

You can complete many chores before the bulk of the spring work begins. In the garden take out the old plants, amend the soil, and plan for the new season.

In the barn and outbuildings, you can spend a less-than-perfect weather day to clean and organize.

Here's a list to get a jump on the game: **Cut back perennials:** A distinct advantage of leaving the stalks of last year's perennials in the garden is to identify the plants in the spring, which can be very difficult to remember when the first, sometimes unidentifiable green, emerges very early. It also allows some varieties to reseed providing more blooms without effort. Cut back most perennials to the ground; they will produce new growth from the roots. A few varieties, such as lavender, simply need to be trimmed to remove old blooms and shape the plant to your preference.

Burn off the weeds: The most fun way to weed is with a propane torch, as long as you are careful when you choose your day, and take care not to burn too much at one time. Before you burn, check with local regulations to make certain it is legal in your area. Pick a calm, cool day to ignite the weeds along ditches and fence lines immediately eliminating tall, dead grasses, and providing plenty of opportunity for new growth.

Prune shrubs and fruits: Trim shrubs to their desired shape and size before the leaves begin to emerge in the spring. You can be fairly severe as long as they are dormant, and take into consideration the new growth during the season. Remove dead canes on blackberry and raspberry bushes, and cut them back to approximately four-feet tall to avoid them from becoming ungainly.

Add compost: Has that compost pile been cooking all winter? This is a good time to flip it, and utilize the black gold at the bottom. Scatter it in perennial beds, as well as the vegetable garden, and incorporate the organic matter into the top inch of the soil. When you're cleaning the old vegetables and flowers from the garden, chop up any plant debris (as long as it isn't diseased), and add it to the pile to continue the recycling process.

Wash plant containers: To prevent disease in your seedlings, thoroughly wash the containers you'll use for plants during the summer. Mix a bucket of soapy water with a half cup bleach to scrub the pots. Hose off completely, and allow them to air dry.

Sweep barn/outbuildings: When the weather is warm, fling open the doors and give the barn or outbuildings a good sweeping to knock out last year's dirt. If there's a particular concern with Hantavirus, a severe respiratory disease spread by mouse droppings, be sure to don a mask to reduce the chance of inhaling dust particles, and wear gloves. You can also spritz the area with a ten-percent bleach to water solution (one and a half cups of bleach to a gallon of warm water) wetting the area and any droppings thoroughly before wiping them up with a damp towel.

Let in the sunshine: While you're sweeping and wiping down the outbuildings, you might as well give those windows a good washing. The trick to streak free windows is cleaning them on a cloudy day, and using a squeegee to finish them. Add a squirt of dishwashing liquid to a bucket of warm water, scrub the window thoroughly with a rag (cloth diapers work great), then pass over with the squeegee wiping off the blade after each pass. If any water is left from the edge of the



squeegee, wipe it off immediately to prevent streaks.

Organize shelves and cupboards: It never fails, when you need the insecticidal soap or fertilizer, you won't have enough. Remove everything from the shelves and cupboards, wipe the off the tops, and take inventory of everything you have. If something is nearly empty, put it on your list to pick up at the farm store so you have it on hand when you need it.

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