HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

EXTERIOR HOUSECLEANING

Most people schedule an annual “spring cleaning” inside their house. However, it’s also important to clean the exterior of your house each year, to remove dirt, grit, and other abrasives that can damage siding or masonry.

PREPARE THE AREA

Before you start the cleaning process, cover the lawn and plantings around your house with plastic sheeting. Seal up all vents, electrical outlets, and exterior light fixtures. Move lawn furniture away from the house, and make sure all windows and doors are closed.

CLEAN THE TROUBLE SPOTS BY HAND

Next, clean by hand any areas stained by rust, mildew, or heavy grime. In many cases, detergent and a scrub brush will be sufficient.

STAIN	REMOVE WITH
Rust	A solution of **oxalic acid**. (Follow up with a **rust-inhibiting primer**, or the stain will reappear.)
Mildew	A **bleach** solution will kill mildew spores.
Organic stains	A solution of **ammonium sulfamate** powder.
Efflorescence	White, powdery deposits of crystallized salts *(“efflorescence”)*, commonly found on masonry surfaces, can be removed with a solution of **muriatic acid** applied with a wire brush.

RINSE AND PROTECT YOURSELF

Rinse off all these products with clear water, and remember to wear protective clothing and goggles.

GENERAL CLEANING

After you have tackled the “trouble spots,” it’s time to begin the general cleaning of the house surface.

LIGHT CLEANING

For light cleaning, an automobile brush that threads onto the end of an ordinary garden hose will work well. (You can attach an extension wand to reach higher areas.) Many brush units have a reservoir for detergent, if you need it to remove the dirt.

HEAVILY SOILED HOUSES

For houses that are more heavily soiled, use a gas-powered pressure washer. Make sure you rent one that can be adjusted to spray water at 1000 to 1500 psi. If you plan to use detergent and/or an extension wand, check that the unit has those capabilities.

PRESSURE WASHERS AND LEAD-BASED PAINT

Water delivered at a higher pressure can remove paint chips from your house. If your house was built before 1978, this process can contaminate the soil with lead-based paint. So, a pressure washer should not be used to remove peeling paint from older homes – just to wash off dirt and grime.

Follow all safety precautions when using a pressure washer, as it can cause injury to you or damage to the house if not handled properly. Work from top to bottom, cleaning overlapping sections about 5 feet wide. Do not spray directly at windows, as the water pressure can break them, and angle the spray down to avoid penetrating under lap siding or shingles.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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