

Spring Cleaning – in the Regency Style

The 16 New Street Housekeeper shares her secrets for spring cleaning the home of the Journeaux family.

Follow her instructions to make your home sparkle from top to toe. Recipes for making your own cleaning products are shown on a separate sheet, How to Make your own Cleaning Products.

YOU WILL NEED

For spring cleaning, in the Regency style:

- Used tea leaves
- Rags - for damp dusting and polishing
- Soft broom
- Feather duster
- Vinegar
- Warm water
- Wax polish
- Black lead for the grate
- Mop and bucket for the floor
- Turpentine to scour the chamber pots – but this certainly would not have been done in the bedrooms!
- A strong smooth stick or carpet beater
- A dustpan and brush

For spring cleaning, in the modern style:

- Microfiber cloths (several) - these are much better than yellow dusters, which leave yellow strands everywhere
- A homemade or proprietary cleaner for the windows (or vinegar and water) – see separate sheet: How to make your own Cleaning Products
- A homemade or proprietary cleaner for the wood furniture - see separate sheet: How to make your own Cleaning Products
- Vacuum cleaner, including the attachments and extension hose
- Bicarbonate of soda
- Mop and bucket if you have a hard floor



Above: The housekeeper makes her own mild soapy cleaner from grated Castile soap, melted in boiling water.

1) Where to begin?

It seems reasonable to start your work at the top of the house – and then towards the end of the day there won't be so many stairs to climb, which has to be a good thing – just ask my knees. Make sure you choose a sunny day and start early – as there will be lots of washing to hang out to dry. Six o'clock is the latest hour at which you should rise. Prepare a good lunch for yourself in advance, as just a piece of bread and cheese would not suffice to keep you going after all the hard work that is required.

2) Take your cleaning supplies with you

As you mount the stairs to the attic, take all of your cleaning supplies with you so you don't have to make multiple trips. If you put everything into a bucket, it can move around the house with you.

3) Air the rooms

Beginning on the top floor, throw open all of the windows to get some fresh air inside – this is especially important if you are housing young people. There are five children living at 16 New Street: Phillippe (12), François (10), William (7), James (3) and Ann (1) – but thankfully the baby doesn't make any mess.

4) Strip the beds, right down to the mattress

Laundry the sheets and pillowcases and hang them outside to dry. We are fortunate to have a wash house to the rear of the property, with our own well. However, I pray that the coal soot will not drift upon the clean sheets before they are dry. In the summer months we lay the sheets over the lavender bushes in the garden to give them a delicate fragrance. Iron the sheets with a flat iron, dampening them with lavender water to act as a natural insect repellent and guard against bed bugs. Take the blankets and pillows outside to beat or shake.

5) Remove the chamber pot

Remove the chamber pots from each room and give them a jolly good clean. Betty, the scullery maid, usually does this out in the yard. If there are stubborn stains, add a drop of turpentine to the scalding water if it is not sufficient to cleanse them. Clean out the chamber vessels (the bowl and ewer) at the same time, scalding them with hot water.



Above: Despite its sophisticated appearance, there is no running water at 16 New Street and no flushing toilet. Every drop of water is delivered in barrels to the door from the well in the back garden. With no baths or washhand basins, the mistress uses just one jug of water for washing. This must be scalded in boiling water to clean it.

6) Give the rugs a good beating

Roll up all of the rugs and take them outside to beat. I usually ask one of the gardeners to help with this – the new rug in the withdrawing room weighs more than a large child. There is a tall tree with a low-lying branch in the garden to the rear of the property, which makes a perfect spot for beating the rugs. The gardener uses a strong smooth stick for beating and he always beats twice, once on the wrong side and once on the right side until no more dust comes off.

7) Clean out the fireplace

All cinders left from the day before should be collected and sifted. These may be used to bank up the kitchen fire when a steady heat is wanted. (Wood ash may be steeped in hot water to produce lye for soap.) Once you have swept out the fire, blacken the grate. Betty uses a soft brush to apply the black-lead and buffs with a soft cloth. Finally lay the fire with fresh coals and dry firewood.

8) Tackling the bed

Brush the mattress with a stiff brush (or use the upholstery attachment on one of those modern vacuum cleaners – that's the flat one that always seems to go missing). Think of me, brushing away valiantly. To eradicate any lingering fustiness, sprinkle the mattress with a little bicarbonate of soda and leave it to do its work for an hour or two before brushing or vacuuming once more. Mistress requests that the bicarbonate of soda for her bed is perfumed with dried lavender.

9) Tighten the strings on the bed

The children's mattresses are supported with rope, which needs tightening on a weekly basis as they are prone to jumping on their beds. I love it at the end of the day when those mischievous rascals are tucked up in bed: 'night, night, sleep, tight', I will say to them tonight with confidence. Hopefully there will not be any bed bugs once I have given their mattresses a good pounding.



Above: The beds at 16 New Street are supported with rope or straps, which need tightening on a regular basis to stop the mattresses from sagging. This is where the term, 'night night, sleep tight' comes from. Coil spring mattresses were invented later, during the Victorian era.

10) Turn the mattress

This is a good moment to turn your mattress so that it wears evenly. I am told that modern mattresses need turning and rotating every 3-4 months.

11) Move the beds

If you have some help (or are particularly strong like myself) think about moving the bed to remove any bits and bobs that have made their way underneath. Mind you don't knock over the chamber pot, if you haven't removed it already.

12) Strew the room with tea leaves

A good housekeeper should always ensure she has a plentiful supply of used tea leaves at hand to strew on the floor. These collect the dust, which would otherwise settle in the corners. To sweep without tea leaves is simply time wasted and destruction. If you cannot afford tea leaves, use herbs instead.



Above: Tea was so highly prized in the early 19th century that Mrs Journeaux kept it under lock and key in a tea caddy. Once the mistress had finished with the tea, the servants were allowed to reuse the leaves for a second or third brewing, and then finally the damp leaves were put aside for cleaning purposes. Here Hester is sprinkling them into the corners of the stair treads to absorb dust. Dust was a huge problem at 16 New Street, as there was a coal fire in every room.

13) Sweep the rooms

Sweep the room with a soft broom, making sure you get into all of the corners. Pay particular attention to the areas under the rugs and furniture where insects gather. Sweep up the mess with a dustpan and brush.

14) Wash the floors

Mop the floor and dry well by tying a fresh dry rag on to the head of the broom.

15) Wipe the surfaces

Using a damp rag, dust all of the surfaces, drying and buffing as you go with a second rag.

16) Dust the pictures and ornaments

Use your feather duster to dust the cornices and tops of the pictures/mirrors. See separate sheet for advice on Caring for porcelain and ceramics.

17) Clean the windows and mirrors

Wash the windows and mirrors with warm water, then rinse with a vinegar and water solution to make them shine. Buff with a lint free cloth or old newspaper to remove streaks.

18) Polish the furniture

Polish all of the wooden furniture using your beeswax polish and dry rags. Be sure to buff well. See separate sheet for advice on Caring for antique furniture.

19) Return the furniture

Return all of the furniture to its proper place.

20) Make up the beds

Make up the beds with the freshly scented linen, bearing in mind that a good housekeeper will remember the fancies of the occupant.