

REAL SIMPLE

20 Clever, Easy Tricks to Shave Years Off Your Home

By Melanie Mannarino



Check your mailbox

Is it peeling or tarnished? Hanging by one sad screw? “Freshness needs to start at the curb,” says Tori Toth, author of *Feel at Home: Home Staging Secrets for a Quick and Easy Sell*. She suggests painting your existing mailbox or upgrading to a new one if necessary.



Clean your trim molding

Between dust, fingerprints, and vacuum scuffs, the baseboards, windowsills, and other molding in your home are bound to look grimy. Go over everything with a damp microfiber cloth to clean and brighten.



Trim shrubs and bushes

Grab the hedge clippers—or at least some gardening shears—and trim back dead flowers, overgrown shrubs, and any other greenery that's grown wild. Weeding never hurts, either. "You want it to look manicured," says Toth. "When things are overgrown, it conveys old age."



Shake out the welcome mat

If yours is covered with leaves, crusted with mud, or just plain worn out, it's time to clean it or replace it. "People forget about that!" says Toth. "So often I'll walk up to a person's house and think, 'Ok, that's not very welcoming.'" Time to spring for a new one altogether?



Swap the switch plates

Builder-grade white plastic outlet covers and switch plates get discolored and worn out. Clean them with a damp microfiber cloth or, better yet, replace them. If they're plastic, aluminum, or steel, you can even clean them in the dishwasher (but not if they're enameled, painted, or plated).



Scrub the grout

No matter how pretty and polished the tile is in your entryway, mudroom, bathroom, or kitchen, if the grout is dirty or mildewed, the whole surface will look dated. "Cleaning the grout makes the entire area look instantly better," says Toth. Admittedly, it's no one's favorite chore, but this how-to video should help ease the pain.



Get the carpet cleaned

Look down: Does your wall-to-wall carpeting need some love? Is it stained, matted, or looking worn? Toth suggests calling in the professionals to clean it—or at the very least, layering an area rug on top of it. “This only works if it’s defining a sitting area,” she notes. That means in front of your sofa in the living and family rooms, or under the table in the dining room. Her favorite look: Keep the rug patterned, with colors that pull in from the rest of the room.



Organize the bookshelves

Curate your book collection for a streamlined, finished look. “Unless you have a library room, you don’t want a solid wall of books,” says Toth, who organizes hers by genre (travel books, design books, fiction) then stands hardcovers with spines facing out and stacks paperbacks flat, with a decorative object on top.