



As spring advances, the draw of a home near the water grows. One option is a townhome at Cambridge Bluffs, a community on the Fox River in South Elgin. Prices start in the low \$200,000s.

# Dirty little secrets

Hoist a broom, dust off your best excuses—spring cleaning time is here

By **Barbara Mahany**  
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Often, it begins rather like a low-lying itch. The sunlight streams in through the finger-smudged glass in that vernal sort of way. Hmm, really ought to spring clean, you think to yourself. Before you know it, the itch—and the spring-cleaning fixation—is driving you crazy.

It's spring, people. Aren't we hard-wired to sweep the wintry blkkh right out the windows and doors?

"I've done a lot of research on this," says Heloise, she of

the Household-y Hints. "Spring cleaning comes from back before electricity, when coal-burning lamps left soot all over the place. They literally would open up and shake out the house."

But how, in a world where so many doodads tug for our attention 24/7, can we possibly call a timeout, while we tend to our cobwebs and dust mites and infinite smudge?

"The dirty secret of spring cleaning is that it sort of inspires us to channel Doris Day or June Cleaver; then all of a sudden reality hits," says Julie Edelman, author of

the best-selling "The Accidental Housewife" (Ballantine Books). "I'm more about doing a little bit. We don't have to kill ourselves in one single binge."

Edelman is a serious subscriber to Oscar Wilde's diss on cleaning. "Remember," she says, quoting the 19th Century Irish poet: "'Man was made for something better than disturbing dirt.'"

Ah, but come springtime, it's so hard to resist.

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## Pros and their dirty secrets

### Thelma Meyer

Real-life inspiration behind Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day products.

**Dirty secret:** Please don't peek at the tops of her books, because Mrs. Meyer nearly always forgets to vacuum up there. And here's her cure to the spring-cleaning blues: "Kind of look forward to it. Think, 'Oh, I'm gonna get this house fresh as new.'"



### Heloise

One-name sensation of "Heloise's Household Hints" fame

**Dirty secret:** "I have absolutely fallen in love again with my vacuum cleaner and the microfiber cloth." She's also big on baking soda, vinegar, rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide. Together, they will tackle most every cleanup.



### Sara Snow

Discovery Channel green-living expert  
**Dirty secret:** Just pull out the lemon juice, baking soda, vinegar, olive oil and simple soap. Snow's litany of kitchen supplies will do everything from shine the dining room table to lift the ketchup out of the carpet. Check out her new book for how-tos.



### Julie Edelman

Modern-day homemaking maven.

**Dirty secret:** Someone comes to your door and you haven't gotten around to spring-cleaning? *Always* have get well cards ready. Put the cards on the mantle, then let in your guest, sigh, and mention how of course you *would* have cleaned by now but for that nasty bug.



## Psst ... try these

### Vinegar

It's cheap, and it won't hurt the Earth. You can use this for just about any cleaning task; try a half-and-half vinegar-to-water solution, or dilute it—1 part distilled white vinegar to 2 parts water, and have at it: windows, mirrors, walls, even floors.

### Microfiber cloth

This little miracle puts the ol' *schmatte* (that's Yiddish for rag) to shame. It gloms on to every stubborn speck of dust. You don't need one spritz of spray. Maybe just a wee dab of water and the whole dusty world is your oyster. And nearly every cleaning whiz we talked to is crazy for these cloths.

### Vacuum

Honey, why wipe when you can suck up the dirt? Nearly every pro in the book is hooked on his or her dust-slurping weapon-on-wheels. These days you can find 'em in wake-me-up colors. And with some rock 'n' roll tunes plugged in your ears, you won't even mind the ol' vacuum whine.



BONNIE TRAFALLET/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO; LOCATION: GRASSHOPPER 510, 1944 N. DAMEN AVE., CHICAGO



**Mary Umberger**  
In the Market

## Where's that odd smell coming from?

That's the question du jour in some Southern locales, where homeowners are learning that the rotten-egg scent of sulfur in their houses isn't a figment of their imaginations.

Welcome to Toxic Torts, the 2009 edition. In it, tainted drywall appears to be vying to become the new "black mold," and drywall-related class-action lawsuits are sprouting like crocuses. The suits, in general, claim

that homes—mostly in Florida, though there also have been suits in Alabama and Louisiana—were built with drywall manufactured in China that gives off a sulfur smell and its gases corrode the homes' electrical wiring and sicken some residents.

The Florida Department of Health, responding to complaints from state residents, commissioned Unified Engineering of Aurora to test sam-

ples of the drywall, and announced the results late in March—concluding, however, that it still wasn't sure the material posed a health risk. It said the results are preliminary and that other testing is ongoing.

The analysis studied three types of the imported drywall from Florida houses, plus one American-manufac-

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### GREENER GRASS

Sparing the sprinkler won't spoil your lawn but it will help nurture the Earth.

SEE GARDENING, PAGE 28

### GUILT-FREE GOODIES

Splurge away when items you covet use recycled products.


SEE THE GOODS, PAGE 21

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