

General tips and tricks

Cleaning solution for soot and other stains on brick

Mix ½ cup of trisodium phosphate and ½ cup of laundry detergent in one gallon of clean water.



Determining if a multi-pane window seal has failed

Clean the inside and outside of the window. If the window still appears dirty, the seal has failed since the dirt is in the sealed space between the panes of glass. Another method is to take a piece of ice and hold it against the window. If the seal is broken, the moisture inside the window will condense onto the inside of the glass where the ice is being held.

Locating gas leaks

If you smell gas, you probably have a gas leak. Immediately call the gas company and report it, especially if it is inside. They will probably tell you to turn the gas off at the gas meter. If the leak is outside and not near anything hazardous that is in use at the time, like an outdoor grill, you can find the leak by using a gas detector (still, though, call the gas company first before you go exploring). Mother Nature's critters can also lead you to a gas leak. Look for brightly colored, iridescent flies near gas pipes and note where they are gathering. They are naturally attracted to gas and come from miles away to find it. Let them lead you to it as well. If you have a general location, then you can put very soapy water on the gas pipe. If you see bubbles, you've identified the location of the leak. Remember to report any leaks to the gas company.

Non-chemical methods to control ants and snails

Ants and snails are part of a good, thriving garden, but they need to be kept under control. Find the smallest mulch possible and spread it on the ground where you don't want ants and snails. Coffee grinds work well, as does sawdust. Spread it out evenly so that it is at least a half inch thick." Depending on the species of ants and snails, even ½" mulch is usually too large. Search for mulch labeled "very fine textured mulch," such as that by Earthgrow. Ants seem to hate it. They won't build nests under it and they won't travel on it. It's kind of fun following their trail from a food source back to the nest since they'll travel hundreds of feet to go around this stuff rather than go three feet through it. With snails, the finely textured mulch apparently cuts the snails' little tummies, so those that dare cross, die.



Maintaining good water flow at your shower heads

Many people will increase the water pressure to the house to get good water flow at the shower heads, especially those on the upper floors of multi-story homes. Doing so, however, can have unintended consequences, such as burst water pipes and failed appliances. Rather than increasing the water pressure, remove the shower head and soak it in a lime and mineral removal such as CLR. If that doesn't work, it might be time for a new shower head, and there are lots of interesting shower heads on the market that can provide you with great showers without increasing the water pressure. The cost of a new shower head is much less expensive than trying to clean up the mess from burst water pipes.



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