

CLEANING TIPS

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Housecleaner hiring tips

Whether it's for a one-time cleaning, or just asking for a little more time at the holidays from the cleaning service you use throughout the year, here are some tips to keep in mind when hiring a housecleaner.

Meet the housecleaner(s) in person. Before you decide to hire them, make sure you feel comfortable having them in your home, especially if you will be on vacation at the time of the cleaning.

Ask if you will incur higher prices during the holiday season. Some companies will add a travel charge if the roads are covered in snow or overtime charges if their employees are busier than normal during the holiday months.

Find out how far in advance to make your appointment. Most cleaning services operate two weeks in advance, but the busier holiday months may require more advance notice.

Ask about special services offered during the holidays. Many cleaning services will unpack and put up decorations, hang holiday lights, wrap and mail gifts, assist during parties and also set up and tear down for the party.

Decide how you want the cleaning service to enter your home. Will they be using a key or garage code if you are not home and do you feel comfortable with that method? You may want to consider asking a trusted neighbor who will be home to let them in and out.

Ask about insurance. Do they maintain proper liability insurance? Are they bonded? Does the company do background checks on employees? Consider cleaning agents. Will the company bring their own

supplies, tools, chemicals? Make sure you approve those items. Fido and Fluffy. Do you need to put your pet(s) away while cleaning is underway?

What's important to you? Talk to the company about what you expect; what you like/dislike. Make any concerns/expectations you have clear up front.

Questions to ask:

Can I see proof of insurance?

What is your hourly rate? And, how is that calculated if my job requires more than one member of your crew?

Do you do one-time cleaning, or only service regular customers?

Is a deposit required for a one-time cleaning appointment?

Do you provide the cleaning products?

For a one-time cleaning, will I need to be present? If not, how would you like to arrange for entry into my home?

What's your policy if something in the house is broken or damaged?

Carpet cleaning tips

Keeping your carpets clean is not only a simple way to rid your home of hidden dust and allergens, it also keeps your carpets looking better and in better shape for longer, so you won't have to shell out a hefty chunk of change to have them replaced before their time has come.

The number one way to keep your carpet looking fresh between professional cleanings is to vacuum regularly with a good (but not necessarily expensive) vacuum. This keeps dry soil from settling in and making the carpet look dirty. Try to remember to vacuum three times a week for optimal results.

Avoid too much exposure. Bare feet on carpet can transfer body oils and contribute a considerable amount of grime, so keep your feet covered by slippers or house shoes whenever possible.

Different types of carpet require different spot-treatment stain care. The majority of carpet is nylon, which is durable and easy to clean. It stands up to most treatments, as well as some of the harsher stain-removers on the market. But if you have wool carpet, you'll need to be careful because natural fibers are a little more delicate and respond best to pH-neutral products. If you have acrylic carpet, avoid exposing it to too much moisture because it won't absorb and will sit on the carpet backing. Whatever type of carpet you have, NEVER scrub a stain—just blot it out.

If your carpet looks dirty, then you're overdue for a cleaning. If you can spot the trouble, just imagine the microscopic grit that you can't see. Dirt can be sneaky. Be sure to check places where dirt might settle in easily and clean there regularly.

Schedule regular professional cleanings about twice a year. It's better for the carpet and for your health. Professional cleaning gets up a lot of the dirt, dander, dust and dust mites that regular vacuums can miss. There are several different types of professional cleaning available. To find the best choice for your household, check out the options below.

"Steam cleaning" is probably the most well-known type of carpet cleaning. To the pros, it's better known as hot water extraction cleaning, because it involves a pre-treatment and then a blast of water (up to 250-degrees!) going on and off of the carpet simultaneously. This is usually the only type of cleaning covered by a carpet warranty.

Carbonated cleaning allows cleaning agents to get to the carpet fibers with very little wetting. The solution doesn't contain the oil or detergents that typically leave a dirt-attracting residue, and dissolved dirt is removed with a machine that rubs cotton pads over the carpet. The HOST system is the only all-dry, all-natural cleaning system that is currently Green Seal certified. It uses an absorbent to pre-treat and clean the carpet by trapping grease and dirt, which is then extracted. It leaves the carpet ready for immediate use, with no downtime. It's completely non-toxic, with no threat of moisture or harsh chemicals.

"Bonnet" cleaning uses spray foam that is removed by a rolling/buffing machine that has a bonnet-like attachment. This is mainly for commercial carpet, and is similar to what buffing a hard floor surface is like.

Find the best housecleaners

For many homeowners, hiring a housecleaner is simply a matter of not having enough time between work, the kids and their personal life (or maybe you just despise cleaning bathrooms). Prices range from \$50 to several hundred depending on the size of your home and what you want cleaned.

Before hiring a housecleaner, be sure to ask these questions:

Will the same cleaning person be sent each time? If this is important to you, and the service can't ensure it you might want to keep looking.

Do you use your own supplies or do I need to provide them?

How will you gain access to my home? Options include leaving a key under the mat and asking the cleaner to leave it inside when they're done; granting access via a keypad or choosing to be home during the cleaning.

What should I do with my pet? If possible, introduce your pet to the housecleaner before their first visit, especially if you won't be home during the appointment. Depending on the introduction, you may want to crate the animal or ask the cleaner to leave the animal in a safe spot outside and then let them back in before leaving.

How do you charge – by the hour, by the project, by the number of personnel? Does your estimate include a "not to exceed this price" clause? What's your policy if something in the house is broken or damaged?

Is the company insured? Do you maintain proper liability insurance? Are you bonded? Do you do background checks on employees?

What types of cleaning does a routine visit cover? If you're alright taking care of the basic day-to-day chores and you really want a housecleaner to take responsibility for dusting, window-washing, base board cleaning and floor scrubbing, make sure you let them know as it may effect the cost.

How long has the cleaning service been in business? And, more importantly, how long has most of the staff been with the service? A brand new company (or an old company with all-new employees) might be something to consider avoiding.

Can I get this all in writing? Remember: you're letting someone into your home. Getting as many of the fine details in writing can help you avoid disagreements down the line.

Tips from the pros:

It's usually easier for the cleaners if the homeowner is not at home.

If you have an alarm, be sure to let the housecleaner know. If you don't want to give the code out, disarm it before you leave that morning.

Be specific. If you want your housecleaner to move beds to get the underlying dust, make that known so you're not disappointed. And if you are disappointed in any part of the service, speak up.

Give us the house rules. Some homeowners will allow housecleaners to grab a snack or a beverage, some don't. Some homeowners don't mind if housecleaners listen to the TV while they're there, some do. Let your housecleaner know what you prefer before it becomes an issue.

Let your housecleaner know from the get-go if you ever might need something extra done, and then give them a heads-up at least a week before you do need that extra. They have other clients and a schedule that you need to respect, and throwing things on them last-minute might leave you with sub-par results overall as they scramble to finish up in their allotted time.

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