

THE HOUSTON HOMEOWNER'S

# ULTIMATE GUIDE

TO SPRING 2017

# TEN THINGS TO DO IN HOUSTON THIS SPRING

There's never a lack of things to do here in Houston. Here are ten events happening this spring to get you out and enjoying all the greater Houston area has to offer.

## HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW & RODEO

March 7 - 26, 2017  
NRG Park

## HOUSTON CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

April 1 - 2, 2017  
Tranquility Park

## SOUTHWEST INTL. BOAT SHOW

April 6 - 8, 2017  
South Shore Harbor Resort & Conference Center

## ART CAR PARADE

April 8, 2017  
Downtown Houston

## 17TH ANNUAL HOUSTON DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

May 6, 2017  
Allen's Landing

## COMICPALOOZA

May 12 - 14, 2017  
George R. Brown Convention Center

## PASADENA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

May 19 - 21, 2017  
Clear Lake/Bay Area

## AIA SANDCASTLE COMPETITION

June 3, 2017  
Galveston's East Beach

## CARNIVAL HOUSTON SHOW + PARADE

June 10, 2017  
Downtown Houston

## JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

June 17 - 18, 2017  
Emancipation Park

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# Spring Home Maintenance

## CHECKLIST

Maintaining a home can seem like a daunting task. Use this handy checklist to get your home ready for Spring.

### **Conduct a Safety Check**

If you didn't do so when you changed your clocks for Daylight Savings, now's the time to check or replace the batteries in your smoke and carbon dioxide detectors. Use this opportunity to also test fire extinguishers in your home and car to make sure they are working.

### **Power Wash Windows and Siding**

Whether the exterior of your home is made of siding, brick or stone, freshen everything up with a good cleaning using a power washer. While you are at it, wash your windows so you can let the light from outside in.

### **Get Your Lawn Ready**

Apply fertilizer once your grass starts growing in the spring. Test your irrigation system to make sure all of the sprinkler heads pop up as expected, none are clogged or malfunctioning and your timer is set properly.

### **Clean Out Your Gutters**

Remove leaves, twigs and acorns from your gutters. Add screens if you don't have them or check existing screens to make sure they are in good condition.

### **Clean and Repair Your Deck or Patio**

Remove leaves and other debris from your deck or patio. Consider staining or resealing your deck to protect it. Check for loose or spongy boards and insect damage and schedule repairs as needed.

### **Plant Your Garden**

Spring is an ideal time to plant most bedding plants, vegetables and herbs, as well as most seeds. By giving plants a good head start, they can establish a healthy root system before summer hits.

### **Replace Your HVAC Filter**

Replace your filter once a season. If you have pets or allergies, or if you live in a dry or dusty area (especially new subdivisions or along dirt roads), this may need to be done monthly.

### **Inspect Your Plumbing**

Take a look at any exposed pipes and inspect for leaks. Clean faucet aerators. In guest bathrooms or other unused areas, run water in sinks and tubs and flush toilets to remove built-up grime and dust and ensure everything is working properly.

# Spring Cleaning

HERE'S WHERE TO DONATE OR DISPOSE OF COMMON HOUSEHOLD ITEMS LOCALLY

## WHERE TO DONATE GENTLY USED ITEMS

### Houston Furniture Bank

*Provides a home away from home for families that must travel to fulfill their children's health needs.*

- Furniture
- Lamps
- Rugs
- Small Appliances and electronics

### Goodwill Houston

*Donations help stock merchandise in stores, fund job programs and help keep Houston and the surrounding areas green.*

- Household items
- Books
- Clothing
- Electronics
- Appliances
- Furniture

### Salvation Army of Houston

*Provides spiritual, social and emotional assistance for men and women to help them re-enter society and return to gainful employment.*

- Appliances
- Furniture
- Clothing
- Household items

### Charity Guild of Catholic Women

*Proceeds from the Consignment Shop benefit its mission of helping children in need in the greater Houston area.*

- Rugs
- Furniture
- Clothing
- Household Items

### Helping Hands Charity

*Donations assist local families suffering from a hardship or crisis.*

- Jewelry
- Appliances
- Furniture
- Clothes
- Exercise equipment
- Electronics

## WHERE TO TAKE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS FOR PROPER DISPOSAL



<b>Appliances</b>	Holmes Road Recycling, Junk Waste Pick Up
<b>Automotive Fluids</b>	Westpark Consumer Recycling Center
<b>Batteries</b>	Batteries Plus, Environmental Service Centers or Westpark Consumer Recycling Center
<b>Compact Fluorescent Bulbs (CFLs)</b>	Environmental Service Center, Westpark Recycling Center, Home Depot and Batteries Plus
<b>Electronics</b>	CompuCycle, GREENspot drop off locations, Goodwill Houston, Environmental Service Centers or Westpark Recycling Center
<b>Ink Toner</b>	Best Buy, OfficeMax/Office Depot and Staples Locations
<b>Glass</b>	Westpark Recycling Center
<b>Plastic Bags</b>	Grocery stores, some dry cleaners
<b>Styrofoam</b>	Environmental Service Center South or Westpark Recycling Center
<b>Yard Waste</b>	Your Neighborhood Depository/Recycling Center
<b>Construction Materials</b>	Building Materials Reuse Warehouse

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# How to mosquito-proof your yard

Spring is such a lovely time of year to enjoy spending time outdoors in Houston. Unfortunately, mosquitoes can sometimes spoil our fun. Here are a few ways to prevent these biting insects from hanging out in your yard.

## TAKE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Mosquitoes thrive in areas with long grasses, unkempt plants and shrubs and piled up branches and other debris. Keep your grass cut short, and regularly trim back plants and shrubs so they don't harbor mosquitoes. If you've got branches or other wood sources piled up in your yard, make sure to clear it away and keep it from piling up again.

## USE NATURAL DETERRENTS

Incorporate natural deterrents into your yard such as citronella, lemon thyme, lemon balm, catnip and feverfew. Natural treatments such as *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* and garlic spray can also help deter mosquitoes.

## TRY DIY MOSQUITO CONTROL

Many chemical treatments, traps and bug zappers can help eliminate mosquitoes. Mosquito traps attract mosquitoes by imitating human characteristics, like producing heat and releasing CO<sub>2</sub>. Bug zappers use a combination of light and electricity to attract and kill mosquitoes.

## REMOVE STANDING WATER

Mosquitoes depend on standing water to reproduce, so take a stroll around your yard a few times a week to make sure there is no water that has accumulated in pots, wheelbarrows and in other areas of your lawn. If you have a birdbath, you can purchase disks which contain a bacteria toxic to mosquito larvae but safe for birds.

## INVITE NATURAL PREDATORS IN

Bats, purple martins, dragonflies, toads, and damselflies are natural predators of mosquitoes. They won't do the job on their own, but in combination with other efforts, they can help reduce the mosquito population. You can encourage these mosquito-eaters to visit your yard by creating a draw, like bat and purple martin houses where they can roost.

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# Spring gardening tips

Although the planting season in Houston is nearly year-round, spring is a great time to either start a garden or make improvements to your existing landscape. Here are some ways you can keep your garden thriving in the year ahead.

## REMOVE DEAD GROWTH

Despite our mild climate, leaves, branches and other debris often accumulate in our yard during the winter months. Take advantage of sunny days at the start of the year to remove dead limbs and sticks and to trim or prune plants in your garden to encourage new plant growth and discourage pests and disease.

## SELECT NATIVE PLANTS

Did some of your plants not make it through winter, or would you like to expand your beds? Select plants that are already adapted to our climate, as native species require less watering and care.

## NOURISH YOUR SOIL

Even the healthiest lawn needs nurturing twice a year using fertilizer. Once plants are established (or healthy above-ground growth appears from seeds) mulch your garden with compost, wood chips, bark or other mulching materials to help retain moisture.

## WATER SMART

Be sure to water regularly, especially when plants are getting established. New plants can often use daily watering until they develop healthy roots. When you water, water slowly and deeply. Avoid watering during the hottest part of the day, as water will evaporate before it can sink into the lower layers of soil.

# 6 Signs You May Need to Repair Your Air Conditioner

Are you unsure about whether your air conditioner will make it through another Texas summer? Here are some signs that you may need to consider repairing your unit.

## **DO YOU HEAR A STRANGE NOISE?**

You probably don't notice the regular hum of your HVAC unit, since you have become accustomed to the noise. Banging sounds coming from your compressor, a persistent buzzing or rattling, hisses and whistles, screeches or squeals or grinding sounds can indicate a range of problems, some of which may require quick attention to avoid longer-term damage.

## **DO YOU DETECT A STRANGE ODOR?**

Strange smells can indicate that insulation has burned out and is in need of repair. More earthy odors may signal that mold is inside of your ductwork or unit, which should be addressed immediately.

## **IS YOUR HOUSE TAKING TOO LONG TO COOL DOWN OR NOT COOLING EVENLY?**

You may have noticed that the air coming out of your vents is not as cold as it used to be or you may be experiencing poor air flow. You may need to have your ducts cleaned or to check your compressor, thermostat or refrigerant level.



## **HAVE YOU NOTICED MOISTURE OR LEAKS NEAR YOUR HVAC UNIT?**

You shouldn't see an accumulation of moisture close to your AC unit. If you do, the problem could be linked to a refrigerant leak or a blocked or broken drain tube.

## **DOES YOUR UNIT SWITCH ON AND OFF REPEATEDLY?**

If your HVAC unit keeps turning on and off, you may have an obstruction in your condenser unit. A thorough cleaning can remove debris that can be causing the problem.

## **ARE YOUR ELECTRIC BILLS HIGHER THAN EXPECTED?**

A spike in your electric bill could indicate a problem with your air conditioning unit. If you switch your air filters and still experience problems, have diagnostic tests run on your unit to help determine why your AC is working harder than normal.

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# Pool Opening

## CHECKLIST



Your pool is a big investment, so you want to make sure you do all you can to perform regular maintenance and avoid costly repairs. Here is a comprehensive list of 9 areas to check to get your pool ready for lots of fun in the year ahead!

### 1. FILTER PUMPS AND OTHER PUMPS

- Are they operable?
- Are any of them making a loud noise?
- Are they priming ok?
- Are there any leaks?
- Are the pump baskets intact?

### 2. FILTERS

- Check filter pressure. Your filter may need to be back washed or have the internal assemblies cleaned or replaced.
- If your filter has a push/pull valve or multiport valve, do they operate smoothly?
- Are there any leaks?

### 3. POOL CLEANER UNIT

- Is it operable?
- Inspect tires, wheel bearings, debris bags, etc.

### 4. WATERSIDE

- Are skimmer baskets and skimmer covers intact?
- Are there any cracks in the skimmer?
- Are the weir doors inside of the skimmers opening and closing as designed?
- If your pool has an auto fill device, is it working properly?

### 5. POOL HEATER

- Is it operable?
- Check for gas and water leaks.
- Inspect for any debris on top and inside of the heater.
- Is the burner tray and heat exchanger in good condition?

### 6. LIGHTING/ELECTRICAL

- Are the lights operable?
- Are the lights free of water?
- Is the time clock and automation panel operable and programmed correctly?
- Is the spa blower operable?
- Does the GFCI (Ground-Fault Circuit-Interrupter) work on the pool and spa lights?
- Are all wiring conduits intact and connections ok?

### 7. CHEMICAL SYSTEM (skip to the next section if you have a saltwater pool)

- Is the chemical feeder flowing water through it?
- Are there any leaks?
- Have you cleaned and inspected your salt cell for calcium build up?
- Is system producing chlorine?

### 8. TEST WATER

- Check Chlorine, PH, Alkalinity, Cyanuric Acid and Calcium Hardness

### 9. BASIC SAFETY CHECKS

- Are anti-vortex drain covers attached?
- Is gate self-closing and self-latching?
- Check condition of diving board, ladders, slides, etc. Check for rust and remove it if needed.



# Easy Home Improvement Projects

Looking for a simple way to give your home an update? Here are some ways to spruce up your living space without breaking the bank or entering into a huge renovation.



## UPDATE YOUR HOME'S FRONT ENTRANCE

Updating your home's entrance is one of the best and least expensive ways to make your entire home more attractive and inviting. Sometimes, a home entrance refresh is as simple as installing a new front door or applying a fresh coat of paint to your existing door along with a new lock, doorknob, and fittings. Repainting any wooden trim around your front door and windows is another great way to upgrade your entrance's look. While you are at it, you can add a new exterior light fixture, a new welcome mat and some potted plants. If you have a chair or swing on your front porch, add some cushions or throw pillows for a lovely pop of color.

## GIVE YOUR BATHROOM A FACELIFT

Give the bathroom a fresh new look with a new toilet and sink or vanity. You can install new sink fixtures yourself, paint a fresh color on the walls or use molding to frame your plain, builder-grade mirror. Add new wall hangings, towels or a new bath mat to add some color or brighten up your space.

## UPDATE YOUR KITCHEN'S APPEARANCE

Any home improvement project involving electricity may seem daunting, but switching out your old light fixtures for fresh new ones is actually easy to do. Simply turn off the power to your kitchen at your home's fuse box, and you're ready to go. Grab your screwdriver, set up a ladder to make the job easier, and you're ready to unscrew the old fixture and disconnect the wires. Then reverse the process to install the new fixture. If you need (and can afford) new appliances, you can really upgrade the look of your kitchen.

## CREATE AN OUTDOOR PATIO

Create a patio area, whether small or large, using flagstones and bags of crushed granite and sand from your local home improvement store. Simply clear the area, pour and smooth out the sand, and then lay down the flagstones in an appealing pattern. Finish it off with crushed granite poured between the flagstones, and voila—you have a rustic and attractive new space that's ready for potted plants, a bench and any other enhancements you like.

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