

## The Minimalist's Guide to Simple Housework

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Nature abhors a vacuum. And so do I. - **Anne Gibbons**

It's a rare person among us who looks forward to cleaning the house. I certainly don't, but a clean house is something I enjoy perhaps too much.

I love a clean, uncluttered house, and I'm not afraid to admit it.



Photo courtesy of [PetroleumJelliffe](#)

So how does a person like me — a clean freak — get the house nice and clean without too much work? I'm sure you know by now that if I can keep things simple, I'm happy.

I constantly experiment with ways to simplify my house-cleaning routine, and what follows are some options I've experimented with or am trying out now. Not all methods will appeal to everyone, but I'm hoping that at least a few of the ideas will have some use to you, and perhaps inspire a simpler routine in your life.

### **Guiding Rule: Simplify, Simplify**

Thoreau, of course, had three simplifys in his famous quote, but I've simplified that rule even further. :)

To keep a house clean with minimal effort, the guiding rule is to simplify as much as possible. The less you have, the less you have to keep clean and put away. Some examples:

- An uncluttered room, with only furniture on the floor, is extremely easy to clean. See below. But if you have all kinds of stuff in the room, you double or triple your cleaning time (or worse).
- Fewer clothes means you have fewer things to put away and to wash. Sure, if you have lots of clothes, you can go longer without having to wash, letting the clothes pile up into a huge Fuji-like mountain. But who wants to face that mountain when you run out of clothes to wear?
- Fewer things on your kitchen counter means cleaning the counter is a snap - just give it a quick wipe with a washcloth and you're done. No straightening things out, cleaning in between or under things, putting things

away.

So the first step in a minimalist cleaning routine is the hardest: declutter as much as possible, so that you only have the things you use often and love to death, and no more. Some guides to doing that: [How to Declutter](#), [15 Great Decluttering Tips](#), [A Guide to Creating a Minimalist Home](#).

### **Second Rule: Meditate While You Clean**

While housework is not looked upon favorably by many people, if done right, it can actually be very relaxing and destressing. The key is to be mindful and present while you clean.

I like to think of a Zen monk sweeping the floors of a temple when I sweep. It's corny, maybe, but it really helps me focus on the sweeping, and it's a form of meditation. In this way, I actually enjoy the cleaning, although I'd rather be writing to be honest.

The best time for planning a book is while you're doing the dishes. - **Agatha Christie**

### **Floors**

The key here, again, is keeping the floors clear of clutter. In my living room, for example, I have my couch and loveseat, a coffee table, a minimalist entertainment center (basically a very low, long table with only my TV on it), my computer table and chair, a side table, a lamp, and a small shelf. Nothing else is on the floor, which means lots of empty floor and very easy cleaning.

Once you've achieved this, here are some options:

1. **Weekly sweep.** If you pick things up during the day and put them where they belong, the only thing your floor should need is a sweep, and perhaps an occasional mop if necessary. Once a week, my kids and my wife and I do a quick 30-minute cleaning — we divide the rooms and clean quickly. Sweeping the floors takes less than 10 minutes, and while I do that the younger kids dust the furniture. The kitchen, of course, needs sweeping a little more than that, but it takes like 5 minutes.
2. **Robot cleaner.** The [Roomba Vacuuming Robot](#) is something I'm thinking of trying out, and if the weekly sweeping or vacuuming doesn't appeal to you, this might be a good option. It works best if you leave the floor decluttered, as mentioned above. Turn it on in the morning when you leave for work, and your floors stay clean.

### **Laundry**

Several options work well for this task:

1. **Weekly or bi-weekly.** This is the option we choose. At the moment, we just take our loads to the laundromat, and get it all done in about 90 minutes. With the amount of loads we do, this saves a lot of time. Bring the loads home, fold and hang and put away. With all our kids helping, it doesn't take long, and then the laundry's done.
2. **Once daily, with a twist.** If doing all your laundry at once doesn't appeal to you, consider this slightly expensive but environmentally friendly (and power and water friendly) option: [the LG front-loading washer/dryer combo](#). No, it's not a stackable washer and dryer. It's a washer and dryer in one machine. That means you can toss in a load in the morning, and when you get back from work, it'll be dry. Just fold and put away, and repeat the next time you need to do a load. Pretty slick.
3. **Drop-off service.** If you're into outsourcing your work, this is a little more expensive, but it doesn't get any easier. Many areas have laundry services where you can drop off your dirty laundry and pick it up at the end of the day, clean and folded.

### **Kitchen**

A few points to make on the kitchen:

1. **Clear counters.** As with the floors, you should keep the counters clear. That means uncluttering it if you've got a bunch of gadgets. I've got a toaster and coffee-maker and nothing else. That makes it easy to wipe things down a couple times a day — takes about a minute.

2. **Clean-as-you-go.** Another point that's key is to wash dishes and wipe up any messes, as you make them. Don't let dishes pile up in the sink. Just wash them as soon as you're done. Takes about a minute or two. If everyone in the house does this, there's no need for a long time spent at the sink. Also, there are usually some pots and pans if you cook — take turns doing this. But be sure to clean as you cook, so that there isn't a huge mess in the kitchen.
3. **Weekly spruce-up.** During our 30-minute cleaning session, not only do we sweep the floors, but we do a more thorough wipe-down of the rest of the kitchen. Doesn't take long as we keep it pretty clean during the week.

## Bathroom

The bathroom can get pretty gross if you let it. Here's how to prevent that:

1. **Clean-as-you-go.** Same as the kitchen: when there's dirt anywhere, clean it immediately. Again, it just takes a minute to wipe up a dirty bathroom sink, to give your toilet a quick swish-and-flush with the toilet brush, or to scrub the shower just before you shower yourself. And you don't need to do these things every day — just when you see dirt. Dirt on the floor? Sweep it or wipe it — 2 minutes.
2. **Bi-weekly cleaning.** If you keep things clean in the bathroom on a daily basis, all you need to do is a quick once-over every other week or so. Do this during the 30-minute cleaning session, when necessary.

## Kids Toys

We've got six kids. It's impossible to keep things perfectly clean when six kids are in one house. But here's what we do:

1. **Regular decluttering.** Every 3-6 months, we go through their closets to get rid of stuff they don't play with anymore. The kids are used to this, and actually do a good job of helping: "I don't use this anymore, Dad!" Keeping their rooms (relatively) decluttered is key to maintaining sanity. They still have lots of toys, but at least it's just the stuff they actually play with.
2. **Baskets.** It's important to have lots of baskets and other such containers. When it's time to clean up, they can just toss the stuff in. No hassle. They also each have a set of three plastic drawers (their "cubbies") that they can use to toss in their personal belongings.
3. **Quick clean-ups.** Throughout the day, messes are made, and we ask them to do a quick clean-up. It'll be messy again in 10 minutes, but at least it's a manageable mess. At the end of the day, the last clean-up lets us have some quiet time with a clean house. I will also go through the house from time-to-time and pick stuff up and throw them in baskets.

## Yardwork

I've got a huge yard. You might not have the same problem. It's nice for the kids to play in, but a hassle to maintain. A few options here:

1. **Hire out.** I finally gave in and hired a yard service, as I just don't have the time or energy to keep the yard up by myself. I still do a few things when I can, but now the yard looks great with minimal effort. Again, think of it as outsourcing a non-core function — you can probably make more money doing something else (for me, it's writing) than what it will cost to pay for the yard upkeep.
2. **Minimal yard.** If you're not going to pay for yard upkeep, you'll want to keep things minimal. That can be anywhere from having no yard, to living in a condo/apartment area where the yard is a common area and maintained by a contractor, to keeping a small yard with very few things in it. That means few plants (only ones that can maintain themselves) and no junk. The less you have in your yard, the better. Some people use a Zen-like rock or gravel garden instead of grass, which isn't a bad option. Or, be a naturalist and let the grass go wild.
3. **Robot mower.** [Friendly Robotics RoboMower](#). Haven't tried this, but it looks super cool. Similar to the Roomba, but for your yard. Takes a bit of initial setup, but once you're done ... wow. If anyone has used this, let me know!

Cleanliness is next to impossible. - **Author Unknown**

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