

10 household jobs to do while self-isolating

From improving the lighting to planting tulip bulbs and de-moulding your washing machine, the property team share their top tips

It's groundhog day. Yes, we all made banana bread and jumped up and down with Joe Wicks to make us feel better during the first national lockdown, but such joys were fleeting. If you want to boost the feelgood factor at home this time, the biggest impact will be in ticking off things that have been on your to-do list.

They are boring and mundane and there is a reason you probably didn't get round to doing them before. However, they add up to small victories. There is a peculiar satisfaction in finally descaling the kettle, repotting the houseplants and literally clearing out the cobwebs. And if you happen to be self-isolating and feeling well, there has never been a better time. Here's what the *Times* property team has tackled over the festive period.

1 Boot camp

Fix your shoe storage

Our front door leads straight into the kitchen, so daily outdoor exercise during the winter lockdown meant a floor caked with mud (writes Katrina Burroughs). I reorganised our walking shoes and gumboots, previously kicked off and piled up by the door, with the help of a Wenko shoe rack from John Lewis and a welly stand (a dozen metal spikes to hold six pairs of upside-down boots)



Organise your pantry or sort out your shoe storage to restore order to your home. Woodman Slussen shoe rack, £290, the Organised Home ALAMY

from Oliver Bonas. Now the footwear is off the floor, the shoe rack is easy to move out of the way if I mop, or I can leave it in place and vacuum underneath.

2 Winter warmers

Cosy up your living room to transition from work to play

I like to live uncluttered (writes Melissa York). My flat is modern with clean lines, wooden floors and white walls. Yet this year, with a long, Covid-y winter ahead and no pub to retreat to, I invested in nesting. Wool throws from the British Blanket Co were the first things I splashed out on. Vintage posters and photography have been replaced with thick canvas

artwork that makes me laugh or wistful. There's a woolly mustard bean bag from made.com to put my feet up on (after a long day of not going anywhere) and I've gone full millennial on the houseplants. Lighting has made the biggest difference. When the sun clocks off at 4pm, the new living room and kitchen-counter uprights come on, the candles come out and there are even, I kid you not, fairy lights on a timer.

3 Come in from the cold

Defrost the freezer

Defrosting my freezer was always one of those things I kept putting off, like vacuuming under the bed or having my prostate examined (writes Hugh



Graham). But three years later, when I could no longer open the top drawer in my fridge-freezer because of an iceberg the size of Mount McKinley, there was no excuse — the new strain of Covid made every trip to the shops a game of Russian roulette, and every inch of freezer space like gold dust. So I let my supplies dwindle until the fridge was nice and empty, then filled it with the contents of my freezer, zipped up in two cool bags. I shut the fridge door for six hours, turned off the power, opened my freezer door wide, and let the melting begin. I put a saucepan of boiling water on the bottom shelf and changed it every half an hour, resting it on a towel so as not to melt the freezer's plastic base.

The melting was painfully slow at first, but a friend, and advisers on the internet, suggested pointing an electric fan at the open freezer door — something about it blowing hot air around — and before long I was hearing satisfying cracks and thuds as icicles crashed to the ground: springtime in my kitchen. Six hours and a couple of wet towels later, my freezer drawer's smooth, effortless glide is a joy to behold, and its capaciousness is astonishing — I never knew I had all that space back there for pandemic provisions. Next stop Iceland.

4 **Sitting pretty**

Reclaim the kitchen table

It took only ten months and one house move, and my kitchen table has finally been reclaimed (writes Gabriella Bennett). For



Tidy up dirty boots with a welly stand
ALAMY



Set of six Skubb drawer tidies, £5, Ikea

most of 2020 it was the hardest-working object in my flat: one day an office, the next a laundry dumping ground. In my new home it has been orientated to make the most of the morning sun and feels almost austere in its lack of clutter. Intent on jollying it up, I bought an emerald-green linen runner from [the Cloth Shop](#) and placed chubby beeswax candles down

the middle, which I light at every meal to turn it into an occasion.

I put my writing desk slap bang in the middle of the room — a bit CEO, as my partner describes it — but from here I can watch blue tits through the window (I'm excusing this kind of distraction as nature therapy) or admire my new Margaret Howell Anglepoise lamp. It has done wonders for my mental health to be able to close the door on work for the night.

5 **Scale down on caffeine**

Descale your coffee machine

My espresso coffee machine was by far the best investment I made for my home (writes Emanuele Midolo).

Unfortunately, the water where I live is so hard that my flaming-red De'Longhi needs regular descaling. I thought I would rather board a plane to





There are YouTube tutorials explaining how to descale a coffee machine

GETTY IMAGES

Naples every day and have my morning espresso in front of Mount Vesuvius than have to do that. Yet Covid-19 gave me the strength — and time — to face up to the challenge.

I must say, it wasn't that hard. There are handy video tutorials on YouTube and my machine came with descaling liquid, which otherwise costs about £2 a bottle. White vinegar is a cheaper, more eco-friendly alternative, but would not be as effective. Because I had never done it before, I had to do three full-brew cycles: two with the descaling liquid and one with fresh water. It was still quicker than having to queue for an Easyjet flight to Italy after all.

6 Clean machine

De-mould your washing machine

Taking inspiration from my parents' washing machine — so spotless inside and out I'd wager you could eat your dinner off it — I spent several hours with my Bosch Logixx and a bottle of Dr Beckmann's Service-It washing machine cleaner, £3 for 250ml from Wilko (writes Victoria



Defrosting your freezer can free up useful shelf space

ALAMY

Brzezinski). I pulled out the mildew-y detergent drawer and gave it a soak in 25ml of the solution and hot water, then

scrubbed away at every nook and cranny with a toothbrush. The worst/most satisfying bit is getting rid of the black mould



growing behind the drawer. I also wiped Service-It on the door seal to prevent mould growth — lovingly getting it into every rubbery fold — then poured the rest of the bottle into the detergent drawer and ran an empty 90-degree cycle.

For the full works, I cleared out the filter too (usually found behind a panel on the bottom right-hand side of a front-loader), first draining the water from the little hose into a takeaway container, then unscrewing the filter to remove a clump of hair knotted around a couple of rogue pieces of rattan from my linen basket. I've set myself another deep-clean reminder in March.

7 Green and pleasant Repot your houseplants

My Boston fern has never looked better since getting a daily misting now I am stuck at home. I dread the thought of what will happen when I once again am able to go away on holiday (writes Clayton Crabtree). I've taken to the more tedious jobs of repotting my plants in the right containers. My temperamental *Calathea roseopicta* has been unhappy in its pot for some time.

I bought an Elho Greenville plant pot with a built-in reservoir and drainage to help to get the watering right. This time of year, with dry air and the radiators on full whack, it's a fine balance getting the moisture just right without having soggy soil. The key, of course, is good drainage —

remember a plant pot without a hole is just a bowl.

8 Bedroom eyes Tidy away the clutter for a good night's sleep

I tackled my sock drawer, and my underwear is now organised by colour and comfort, all of which helps make me to sleep more easily at night (writes Helen Davies). I have meddled with most rooms in my flat during lockdown, from forgotten cupboards to redisplaying mugs and recipe books for the smallest hint of change in my daily life, but I failed to give my bedroom the same attention until now.

A day sorting out clothes, folding and hanging the ones I want to keep and finally clearing the chair of crumpled ironing; a clean-out of all lotions and potions; and a reordering of the bedside table and I feel more able to cope with 2021. Even better, I have invested in a memory foam mattress topper in the sales, which I am topping off with freshly-ironed sheets.

9 Spring into action Plant bulbs

We all need something to look forward to that cannot be cancelled, and spring flowers are just the thing (writes Carol Lewis). I got into gardening during the first lockdown. Adopting a “plant-it-and-see” approach on my north-facing urban terrace has resulted in beautiful colourful displays of plants that traditionalists wouldn't plant in pots or the shade. With this in mind, I am

going to say that now is an excellent time to plant tulip bulbs, although not daffodils, crocus and narcissi. I know the packet says you should have done it earlier, but it's fine as long as the ground isn't waterlogged or frozen. Go ahead, plant, and you will have cheerful blooms to look forward to.

10 Nice and nostalgic Organise your pantry

I loved the cool north-facing calm of my grandmother's pantry, with its cold slab and blue and white Be-Ro tins (writes Jayne Dowle). Nothing would delight me more than one of my own, but for now I'll take solace in organising my baking cupboard. The bottom half is where I keep my glass and china bowls and dishes, hardly valuable heirlooms but priceless in memory. Each one brings a family snapshot to life: jelly for Sunday tea with my aunt (chipped Clarice Cliff); trifle at childhood Christmases (green diamond-cut glass); and the huge white enamel mixing bowl passed down from my great-grandmother — used also for bathing babies, it's said.

The top half, where the baking ingredients find their place, vacillates between hurried chaos and blissful order. It's so soothing to restore calm by stacking and relabelling the jars of flours, sugars, sultanas, currants and raisins, corralling the cinnamon sticks and candles, and thinking of birthday cakes yet to be baked. ■

