

Ask Martha



How can I remove stains from a granite countertop?

—Lenita Mendes, Brampton, Ont.

Since natural stone is porous, moisture that pools on it for more than a few minutes—a bit of olive oil under the bottle, an errant coffee spill—can seep in. A sealant will prevent this, but it wears down over time. “If you notice that short-term contact with water darkens your stone, that’s the best indicator that you need to reseal,” says Mark Meriaux, technical manager at the Natural Stone Institute, in Oberlin, Ohio. Here’s a strategy for removing even deep-set discolorations.

CLEAN THE AREA For an oil stain, wipe with grease-lifting dishwashing soap, such as Dawn. For other types (food, coffee, tea), grab a hydrogen-peroxide-based cleaning spray, like Lysol with Hydrogen Peroxide: Oxygen Splash. Though gentler “safe-for-stone” options are ideal for regular cleaning, this works best on dark marks.

TREAT IT Mix a poultice paste of baking soda and water (for oil-based stains), or baking soda and peroxide (for others), until it’s thick as peanut butter. Spread it over the spot, cover with plastic wrap that you’ve poked a few holes in, and secure with masking tape. Let stand for 24 hours.

REMOVE AND BUFF Pull off the plastic, and clear the white residue with a wooden or plastic scraper. Then rinse the surface with distilled water and polish with a cloth.

I want to adopt an older shelter cat. Any advice?

—Jess Stewart, York, Pa.

First, congratulate yourself for making a life-saving decision; senior rescues are at greatest risk of being euthanized, says Kate Hurley, director of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program. Then take these steps to add a new family member:

FIND A GOOD SHELTER

Search for one with positive reviews and an open-adoption or adopters-welcome policy. These facilities will gladly take a cat back if the fit isn't right.

MEET YOUR MATCH

Is your ideal feline active and adventurous, or shy and reserved? Does he love affection, or alone time? The shelter staff can offer insight into their residents' personalities. And remember: Adult cats are already socialized. "You're finding a pet whose vibe already suits yours," says Hurley. "It's like dating, versus raising a child."

WELCOME HIM HOME

Changes of scenery can be jarring to older cats, so place Whiskers in a small room with his litter box to start, and let him explore at his own pace. This will allow for a smoother adjustment.



What's the best way to clean hard-water marks off my glass shower doors?

—Celia Monnasis, Kissimmee, Fla.

Showers can be a cleaner's archnemesis, thanks to the triple threat of moisture, high heat, and residue from soaps and shampoos, says Saudia Davis, CEO of GreenHouse Eco-Cleaning, in Brooklyn. Perhaps worst of all, minerals in water can deposit cloudy buildup on glass surfaces, even in well-ventilated bathrooms where squeegieing is second nature. To remove the film, Davis suggests this powerful one-two punch: Put baking soda or Bon Ami powder cleanser on a microfiber cloth, moisten with an equal mixture of water and distilled white vinegar, and smear it all over the doors. Spray with more of the vinegar solution until lightly saturated, let stand for five minutes, then wipe away with a soft scrubber (avoid steel wool, which can scratch glass). To restore shine, spritz with rubbing alcohol and polish with a clean cloth.

| TEST-KITCHEN TIP |

Golden Opportunity

To crank up the crunch on fried chicken or fish, replace regular breadcrumbs with panko. This Japanese type starts with crustless white bread that is air-dried, then processed into tiny slivers—as opposed to traditional store-bought varieties, which are made with many kinds of bread ground into finer bits. "Panko has a lighter texture, so it soaks up less oil while cooking," says assistant food editor Riley Wofford, who also rolls it into meatballs for a softer bite. What's not to loaf?

When is a balance transfer a good idea?

—Amari Sandsman, Charleston, W.Va.

This strategic way to manage debt entails moving a credit-card balance to another card—ideally one with a lengthy zero-percent intro-APR period, like the U.S. Bank Visa Platinum (20 months) or the Citi Diamond Preferred (18 months). "Then you can work toward paying it off without the total compounding in the meantime," says Steven Dashiell, credit-cards expert at Finder.com. Switchovers usually involve a fee of 3 to 5 percent of the balance, so make sure you have enough debt that the amount you'll save in interest exceeds the fee, but not so much that you can't pay it off within the interest-free window. To see if the move makes sense for you, enter your numbers into the balance-transfer calculator at Finder.com.



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GOOD LIVING ASK MARTHA



| TIME-SAVING TIP |

Put Down the Peeler

All squash skins are edible, and full of fiber and vitamin A to boot. But some are far more palatable than others, says Riley. Delicatas, honeynuts, and acorns, for example, have thin skins that soften readily when cooked. Consider size, too: Big squashes tend to have tough exteriors, but their pint-size versions have chewable ones. If you find miniature butternuts or kabochas, grab a few, and enjoy them in their entirety.



GOULD IDEAS

To get our favorite acorn-squash recipes, hover your phone's camera here, or go to marthastewart.com/acornsquash.

LET US HELP YOU!

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I think my dog has separation anxiety. How can I help her?

—Charles Matthias,
Lowell, Mass.

The telltale signs: She spirals into a barking frenzy immediately upon your departure, or perhaps you return to find she's clawed through the carpet. Because such canines experience large emotional swings, try to avoid anything that encourages them, says Rolan Tripp, DVM, founder of the Animal Behavior Network. When you get home, stay calm, rather than matching Willow's ecstatic greeting, and don't engage with her until she settles down. And when you leave, make your exit nonchalant, rather than investing a lot of emotional juice right before shutting the door. Each morning, take your pup on a walk to help her expend some energy, and leave her breakfast in a food puzzle, like the Wobbler (\$15, petco.com). She'll have to move it around to get the kibble out—which will provide a key mental distraction in those critical few minutes after you've slipped out.