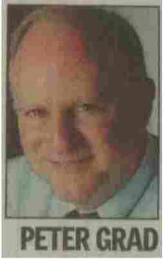


THE PC GUY: SPRING CLEANING

Have you tackled your spring cleaning yet? If so, don't roll down your sleeves yet. There's still work to do.



PETER GRAD

Your computer needs its annual tune-up, too. And now is as good a time as any to take several easy steps that'll clear the clutter and give your aging machine a well-needed boost.

Here are several steps you can take:

1. I don't know about you, but I am a collector. My girlfriend has another name for it: obsessive-compulsive slob. I prefer the former term. Call it what you will. But when the piles build up, items become harder to find.

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The same thing happens when your clutter is digital. I have tons of files, and frankly, some of them are wasting space.

To trim wasteful data from my drives, I like to run **TreeSize** first. This simple utility displays folder sizes that let me see immediately where the bloat is. It helps me identify files I no longer use or want, and I can then use Windows Explorer to zero in on specific files and delete the clutter.

2. Many of us have programs – or fragments of older programs – lying around and taking up space. Do an assessment of programs you no longer use, and then go to the Control Panel and click on **Add/Remove programs**. You'll be presented with an inventory of all your installed programs. You can remove them with the click of a button.

3. **WinPatrol** has established it-

self as a must-have program for about a decade. In addition to scouting for malware, it keeps tabs on internal processes that run behind the scenes as I work on my computer.

Not all processes are necessary; some needlessly hog RAM, some actually may be slowing your system down or rendering it unstable. **WinPatrol** identifies all running processes and lets you disable or remove those you don't need. The Plus version of **WinPatrol** (\$29) gives you access to an extensive online database that'll give you plenty of information about who the good guys are and who the bad ones are. You may be surprised at how many excessive processes are whirring away in your computer.

4. Perhaps the greatest source of accumulated needless files lies several layers deep in your browser caches. Web pages you've visited, including images, are seemingly endlessly stored on your drives.

Get rid of these space wasters with **CleanCache 3.5**, a comprehensive garbage sweeper from a company with the curious name of **ButtUgly Software**. Don't let the name give you pause, this program is terrific.

5. The more you browse the Internet, log on for e-mail, create files, edit photos and delete programs, the more fragmented your drive becomes. Fragmentation is constant. The hit that your computer takes in speed can be recognizable within a short time, as file segmentation grows unabated.

I use **Diskeeper 2007**, easily the most efficient defragmenter available, to keep my discs in perfect order. There are free defragmenters, but the proper alignment of file segments is so vital to efficient operation, and **Diskeeper** is so good at it, that I strongly recommend shelling out the \$29 to purchase this program. It has been a pleasure to see how **Diskeeper** evolved over the last few years from a low-maintenance utility to an absolutely no-maintenance utility that you will

forget you have the moment after you install it. It works that quietly, unobtrusively and efficiently. Get a free trial copy at diskeeper.com.

The alternative is **Windows' System Defragmenter** that you can find under Programs/Accessories/System Tools. It's slower and must be manually run, but it'll get the job done.

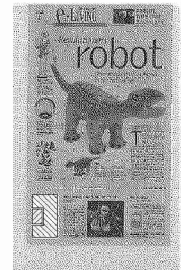
6. Do you have cables scattered all around your desktop setup? You can peruse cable covers, cable turtle organizers (devices that tuck away excess cord in colorful plastic shells) and tons of related devices for a few bucks apiece at cableorganizer.com. Or simply use leftover wire twist tabs from bread bags or other household items to bundle cables together.

7. Check all your USB, parallel, serial, RCA and phone **plugs**. Pull them out, and plug them back in securely. (Be sure to remember where they all go.) Make sure there are no kinks or breaks in them.

8. You'd be amazed at how much dust can accumulate inside a computer. Dust can affect sensitive electrical components as well as hamper critical cooling operations of built-in fans. The solution: a good spritzing with a can of **compressed air** – any brand is fine, just don't pay more than \$5 a can. (How weird is it that we must pay for air?) Detach the computer power cord, open your case, and give your computer's innards a good few blasts of air. While you're at it, give your keyboard a blast, too, to get rid of those aging cookie crumbs.

Pete's picks

My picks this week are the free versions of three of the files mentioned above. For your copies, send me individual e-mails with the appropriate code word in the subject field. Please include your name and town in the body of the messages. And note that Gmail does not accept programs and Optonline has file size restrictions that sometimes block my e-mails to you. For **WinPatrol**, code word is **PCGUYWIN**; **CleanCache**, **PCGUYCLEAN**; **TreeSize**,



PCGUYTREE. I strongly recommend upgrading your free copy of WinPatrol to the Plus version at winpatrol.com. TreeSize also offers an upgrade with tremendous enhancements and graphic displays. It's \$21 at jamsoftware.com.

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