

PERSONAL FINANCE / SPENDING

## How to Find an Affordable Housecleaner

Ask the right questions before enlisting the services of a new housecleaner.



By Susannah Snider, Staff Writer | Aug. 31, 2017, at 11:53 a.m.



Hiring a regular housecleaner was once considered a luxury for anyone but the ultra-rich. But today, especially with more dual-income or [single-parent families](#) stretched for time, outsourcing the scrubbing, dusting and sweeping can be real a sanity-saver.

"Consumers are starting to wake up to how much their time is worth," says Melissa Homer, chief cleaning officer for MaidPro, a Boston-based cleaning services company and franchise. The ability to spend an extra few hours each week on work, childcare or relaxation, she says, makes it worthwhile for many families to contract out regular cleaning tasks to the professionals.

But choosing the right housecleaner is about more than just finding someone who's willing to vacuum and dust the furniture for the right price.

After all, what other contractor enters your house when you're not at home, potentially interacting with your pets, children and valuable belongings? Who else has a copy of the keys to your front door? Do you trust anyone else to not permanently damage your [newly renovated kitchen](#) counters?

So how do you find a housekeeper who meets your cleaning needs while maintaining your trust? And how much should you expect to pay? Here's what to know.

**Do your research.** There are myriad places to start your search for a housecleaner. You can head online to Google, Angie's List and other home services sites. Investigate the services and rates offered. Don't forget to [read online reviews](#) for housecleaners on several different review websites. Why? "It's easier on some sites than others to stuff the ballot box," Homer says.

Another way to start your search is by asking neighbors, friends and relatives for recommendations for their favorite independent cleaner or housecleaning company. You might get the tipoff to a local favorite who doesn't appear high up in internet search results.

**Ask questions.** Make sure that you ask the potential housecleaner or cleaning company insightful questions to determine whether they're the right fit for you.

For example, ask them what their procedures are to ensure consistency in their services, Homer says. How do their training systems and workflow procedures allow for consistent service week after week? That question is "going to throw them for a loop and separate the riffraff from the professionals quickly," she says.

Inquire about the company's policy on background checks for workers and about how the housecleaning service stores and protects your house keys, says Meg Roberts, president of Molly Maid, a professional maid service franchise company. Consider inquiring about the kinds of [cleaning products](#) used – will you need to supply your own? – and what their approach to and definition of "clean" is, says Debra Johnson, home cleaning expert for Merry Maids, a residential cleaning and services franchise company. You want to ensure that your concept of cleanliness meshes with theirs.

It's also a good idea to ask about [insurance](#), experts say. A company that insures its employees may have more resources to cover the cost of your belongings should a cleaner accidentally ding, dent or destroy something valuable. It can also protect employees if they, say, slip and fall while cleaning the bathtub.

Ultimately, you'll have to decide whether to go with a national company, which may have more systems in place for addressing concerns and doing background checks, or a local contractor, who may have a more personal touch or a longer presence in the community.

**Note costs.** The costs to hire a housecleaner vary widely, experts say, depending on the size of the house, the frequency of the visits, the level of dirtiness and the type of cleaning required. At Molly Maid, for example, the price may range from \$100 to \$140 for a houseclean once every two weeks, Roberts says, but those costs depend on the customer's specific needs, services provided and even the region in which they live – the company needs to pay cleaning professionals higher wages in pricier parts of the country.

You may need to pay more for cleaning services if you, for example, have three children and two dogs than if you're a retired couple who spends most weekends out of town. "We really

customize the clean and the price to the actual home and to what the customers looking for," Roberts says.

But in general, expect to pay more for longer, more complex cleaning needs and less for simpler, shorter bouts of cleaning. "At the end of the day, it breaks down to how much time it takes per room per human per hour," Homer says. So, for example, having three cleaners work for one hour will cost about the same as paying one cleaner to tidy up for three hours.

Expect to pay less per visit if you schedule frequent cleanings, experts say, since more frequent visits require less work.

As you're getting cost estimates over the phone or in person, beware of anyone who quotes you a much lower price than other companies, Homer says. They may be able to charge that rate because they do "rotational cleaning," she says, meaning they may only clean some surfaces on every other visit, resulting in a "half-dirty house all of the time," she says.

Don't forget that [cash tips](#) are appreciated, although not required, for good service. "In maid services, it's similar to salon services," Roberts says. "More often than not, people tip, but not 100 percent of the time. It's an acknowledgment of a job well done." Homer recommends tipping, for example, \$10 after each biweekly visit, than, say, saving up your tips for one \$240 end-of-the-year gift. But, she says, "Generosity is wonderful however you express it."