

Home & garden

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Garbage disposals are not trash cans

Recognize their limitations before using

BY DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

When garbage disposals began to appear in home kitchens in the 1970s and '80s, many people heralded them as an easy way to get rid of stinky and sticky things.

The garbage disposal was invented by architect John W. Hammes in 1927. He started his own company, InSinkErator, and the first units were made available for sale in 1938 after 11 years of development.

New York City did not allow garbage disposal until 1997 because officials didn't want the food waste to enter their sewage systems. Disposals are used less in Europe for the same reason.

However, those who like using — or selling — garbage disposals point out that food scraps that don't go down the drain often go to the landfill.

In Pleasanton, we have the best of both worlds. Green waste and scraps are picked up and delivered to the transfer station, where they are processed and turned into compost. Plus the food particles that go down the sink are separated from the water then put into a digester that produces methane, which is mixed with natural gas that fuels big engines to make electricity that powers the plant.

Waste stream water is recycled for use on golf courses and playgrounds, said Sue Stevenson of the Dublin San Ramon Services Water District, and the first time it was done DSRSD discovered that small produce labels were clogging sprinkler heads.

"You should take those off and put them in the trash," Stevenson said, adding that she can see why people would think they were paper but plastic holds up on moist fruit better.

She also cautioned folks to keep fats, oils and grease from going down the drain where they might clog up the drain or even the sewer pipes.

"People don't realize they are responsible for the part of the sewer pipe that goes from their home to the sewer main," she said. "Garbage disposals are not trash cans."

Only small amounts of table scraps should go into the disposal at a time, and some things should go into the garbage can, never into the disposal unit (see sidebar).

The greenest way to deal with food scraps, of course, is to compost them at home and nourish your plants with the nutrient-rich results, but ah, the convenience of the garbage disposal. ■



Do NOT put in garbage disposal

- Rice and pasta. Babies eat them just fine but garbage disposals have trouble digesting them since they swell when they come in contact with water. The small bits gather in the trap and swell until it is jammed.
- Egg shells. Who knew? They do not sharpen the blades, as we heard for years. They break into teeny pieces that may end up clogging the line.
- Any type of stringy vegetable, including onion peels, asparagus, lettuce or celery. Fibers can tangle and jam the motor and block drains.
- Fat, oil and grease, which can clog the drain and the sewer pipes.
- Large animal bones (beef, pork, etc.).
- Coffee grounds, which can accumulate in drains and pipes, causing clogs.
- Glass, plastic, metal or even paper.
- Anything combustible.
- Cigarette butts.
- Don't put too many potato peels down the garbage disposal. The starches will turn into a thick paste and may cause blades to stick.
- Harsh chemicals like bleach or drain cleaners. They can damage blades and pipes.
- Feed food into the garbage disposal a little at a time with the cold water running. (Hot water can cause grease to liquefy and accumulate.)
- When grinding is complete, turn off the the garbage disposal but let the cold water run at least another 15 seconds to flush out any remaining particles.

On the cover:

Adding decorations such as towels and plants can give a home a "friendlier and happier" feel, according to Simone van der Waart van Gulik, owner of Living Classy Staging & Redesign in San Ramon.

—Courtesy of Living Classy Staging & Redesign



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"The Son that Brightens Your Day"

Stash your 'stage' fright

Decorating boosts pay off in good and bad markets

By SUSAN C. SCHENA

Business was brisk for area home stagers during the recent real estate slump as sellers relied on professionally finessed interiors to make their properties shine.

And now that the market has regained gusto, business is still booming for these niche decorators whose tricks of the trade typically translate to faster sales at higher prices.

"It has not slowed down for the last four years. Everybody is staging," said Jill Copeland, owner of M Design Staging of Pleasanton. "If the home is staged right, you can sell it in the first weekend."

"When there were more homes on the market, staging was ever so important to make your listings stand out," said Realtor Janice Habluetzel of RE/MAX Accord in Pleasanton. "In this market, you stage to get top dollar."

Habluetzel offered up a recent example: Her central-Dublin, ranch-style listing with a white interior. Too white, she said. "It was all white walls, and even a white leather couch."

Habluetzel brought in her stager, who added color splashes of putty, tangerine, reds and greens through art, pillows and accessories.

"The whole house felt different," she said. "We received 12 offers, and

it sold for more than \$60,000 over the asking price. So many people wanted the home — it felt clean, contemporary and very hip."

And 'clean, contemporary and hip' are precisely what stagers aim to present. While traditional interior designers labor to capture individual clients' styles, stagers decorate for the mass market.

"Stagers make houses appeal to other people," said Simone van der Waart van Gulik of San Ramon-based Living Classy Staging & Redesign. "We change decor and color schemes. Most houses are too neutral. We add colors, and make the houses friendlier and happier."

"People will buy a house — or not buy a house — in 15 seconds," said Realtor Shane Bohlen of Ruby Hill Sales/Better Homes and Gardens. "If it doesn't look good, they're not going to buy it. You want to make it look like a high-end hotel. You want to make it look current."

Agent Habluetzel estimates that at least half of her listings need some level of staging, a practice dating back to the 1970s. Thinning out knickknacks or rearranging owners' belongings dubbed "fluffing" in the stage trade is sometimes all that is needed, she said.

"Fluffing is fine if you have the

right stuff," she said. "But 90 percent of the homes need more than fluffing. Sometimes you have to move out the 30-year-old, outdated furniture with spots and stains." And Copeland, like most established stagers, then taps her stash of art, headboards, tables, sofas, chairs, bed linens, throws, towels and even dishes to complete the room overhauls. "You make the sellers look like hip, happening people," she added.

Stager Van der Waart van Gulik agrees: "Most people have dark or heavy furniture and or too much furniture." Lamps and artwork are often out of scale to room spaces. "Sometimes people are not very visual, so staging helps," she said. "And it helps in vacant homes. Buyers imagine themselves living there."

So who picks up the tab for these 'prop' re-dos? Typically the sellers, say industry experts, although that is sometimes negotiable between agents and clients. Major jobs, which involve substituting owners' furnishings with more modern rented decor, can add up to several thousand dollars. Expect to pay about \$6,000 to dress a 5,000-square-foot for two to three months. Basic color or "clutter" consultations can start at about



COURTESY OF M DESIGN STAGING

Staging a vacant home like this one in Pleasanton can help the property sell because potential buyers can better imagine themselves living there. Jill Copeland of M Design Staging in Pleasanton says if a home is staged correctly, it can sell in the first weekend.



See **STAGING** on Page 17



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STAGING

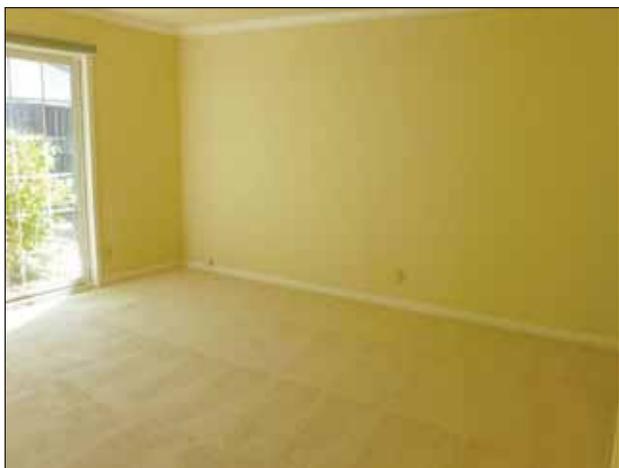
Continued from Page 16

\$150. But in Bohen's experience, the return is 10 times the investment. Spending, say, \$2,000 to stage a property, he said, usually nets an additional \$20,000. "It's always worth it."

Realtors typically introduce stagers to clients, so those relationships are key, Copeland said. Anybody can come in and say they're a stager, she said. "You don't want someone who just moves your outdated stuff around. You want to see their most recent projects." And if homeowners need nudging to stage before hitting the market, that delicate task falls to the brokers.

"On occasion, I get resistance from the sellers and they don't want to have much done," Habluetzel said. "But that's the rare case. Staging will get positive results and it's worth the investment."

"Stagers don't sell the houses," Copeland summed, "but we make them sell."



COURTESY OF M DESIGN STAGING

Modern décor makes the home look "hip and happening," so stager Jill Copeland of M Design Staging in Pleasanton keeps a stash of art, headboards, bed linens and throws.

**The 'forgotten' areas**

Common household items can last longer with regular cleaning

Common household items can suffer from the wear and tear of everyday use, but a few simple cleaning tricks will help keep them in good condition and extend their lifespan, saving money and angst in the long run. Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

Dryer: Make sure to empty the dryer's lint trap on a regular basis. Keeping this often forgotten area lint-free will increase the efficiency of a standard tumble dryer by allowing warm, moist air to flow freely out of the appliance as clothing dries.

Additionally, keep in mind that some brands of dryer sheets can leave an invisible film on the lint trap. To test yours, run water through it — if it holds water, it's suffering from build-up. If this is the case, scrub it with a stiff brush and soapy water every six months.

Carpet: Vacuum at least once a week to remove the dust and debris that settles in carpet fibers on a regular basis. If you have shedding pets, or family members who suffer from allergies, you may need to vacuum more frequently.

Floor care experts recommend deep cleaning carpets at least twice per year to remove the dirt, stains and allergens vacuums can leave behind.

Shower Head: If the water pressure in your shower is less than ideal, chances are your shower head is suffering from mineral deposits that inevitably accumulate over time. To promote better water flow, remove the shower head from the wall,

if possible, and soak in white vinegar for 15 to 20 minutes. Rinse thoroughly in the sink, reattach to wall and turn on the water to observe your shower head working at its best again. If you can't remove the shower head from the wall, bring the solution directly to the problem: slip a rubber band tightly over the shower head, fill a plastic bag with white vinegar and submerge the shower head until all holes are covered. Secure in place with the rubber band and soak 15 to 20 minutes before removing.

Refrigerator: Commonly overlooked, the refrigerator's condenser coils — often located in the back on older units and beneath the doors on newer models — are instrumental in allowing the appliance to cool properly. Since dust, grime and pet hair can build up on the coils, it's important to clean them twice a year to ensure your refrigerator is running as efficiently as possible. To do this, unplug the unit for safety, then locate the condenser coils. Vacuum them with the wand attachment of your vacuum, going back over any stubborn areas with a stiff brush if needed. If there's still grime left, you can use a rag and warm, soapy water, but make sure to let the coils dry completely before plugging the unit in again.

Once they're on your radar, these simple cleaning tips are easy to incorporate into your routine. With a little time and upkeep, you'll find the items you use on a daily basis are in better shape than ever before.

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