Washing the dishes...

by Deborah Oster Pannell

The water, flowing over my hands, is the first step in creating the calm, peaceful feeling I'm after. It has to be just the right temperature - hot enough to kill germs, but not to the point of scalding my sensitive skin. My hands are beginning to show signs of ageing, and I should probably be moisturizing them more often, but at the very least, I shouldn't damage the drying tissues by purposefully overheating them.

There are certain items in the sink that are giving me an anxious feeling in my stomach. The frying pan, with the slightly crusted remains of scrambled eggs and cheddar cheese burnt onto its surface. Clearly it's not a non-stick pan, which alleviates my concerns over strange, plastic infused metals, but it does create a bit more labor on the back end. It's one of the big challenges, so maybe I should scrub it out first, and then coast home on the more gently used plates, glasses and silverware.

Fortunately, I have a very well made hard plastic spatula that scrapes off the stubborn egg coating without scratching the surface of the pan. By the time I've given it the once over with that, the residue comes out easily with a gentle, plastic and sponge scrubber. It helps to have the right tools for the job.

Once I've rinsed and neatly stacked to dry all the breakfast dishes, preparatory bowls, knives, pans and utensils, I give all the surfaces a spraying and wipedown. The results are a neat and orderly space, with no overt signs of the morning meal, no crumbs, no dried liquids on the counter. It makes me feel calm inside to look around. My breathing has settled immeasurably.

The only thing left to do is sweep and mop the floor. In fact, the bathrooms could use the same once over. Probably the whole house.

But this is where it gets complicated, yes? What's the limit? Where do I stop? Perhaps I should just quit while I'm ahead, and revisit this cleaning thing a little later on...