

# Keeping Up

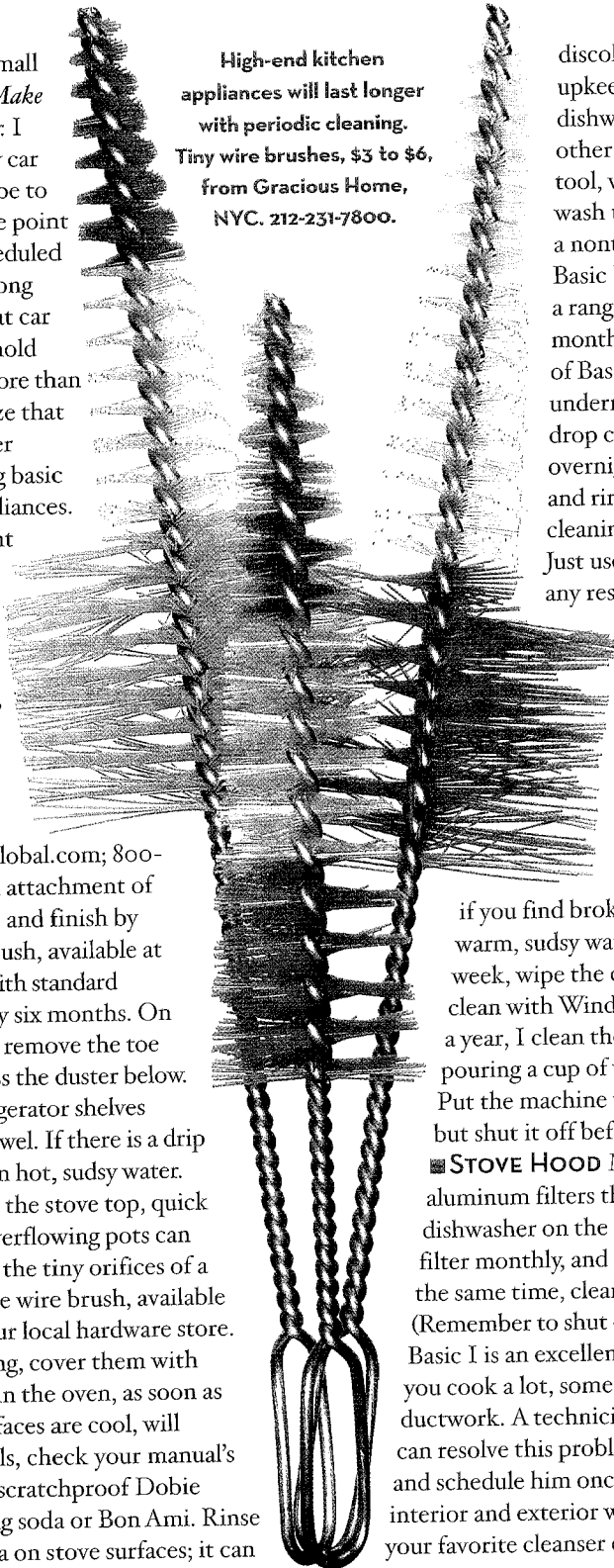
DOMESTIC BLISS

## MAINTAINING KITCHEN APPLIANCES BY GLENN RECCHIA

**S**ome years ago I acquired a small paperback entitled *How to Make Your Car Last Almost Forever*. I had just bought my first new car and thought how splendid it would be to never have to purchase another. The point of the book was that with basic scheduled maintenance one could indeed prolong the life of a vehicle. I held on to that car for ten years. With high-end household appliances now costing quite a bit more than I paid for the car, I've come to realize that they, too, will last longer with proper upkeep. I recommend the following basic maintenance for major kitchen appliances.

■ **THE REFRIGERATOR** I can't count the number of Sub-Zero owners who don't realize that the refrigerator's condenser needs regular cleaning to prevent overheating. If you have a Sub-Zero, remove the condenser's grille every six months. Because the aluminum fins inside are easily damaged, I begin by dusting with a gentle tool like the Total Reach duster ([ungerglobal.com](http://ungerglobal.com); 800-833-6100). Next, use the soft brush attachment of your vacuum to remove more dust, and finish by brushing with a refrigerator coil brush, available at hardware stores. On refrigerators with standard condenser coils, vacuum these every six months. On all refrigerators, every few months remove the toe grille, located at floor level, and pass the duster below. On a more regular basis, wipe refrigerator shelves weekly with a well-wrung, soapy towel. If there is a drip pan, remove it monthly and wash in hot, sudsy water.

■ **STOVE TOPS AND RANGES** On the stove top, quick attention to drips, spatters, and overflowing pots can eliminate repairs later on. To keep the tiny orifices of a gas cooking burner clean, use a fine wire brush, available from the paints department of your local hardware store. If spills occur while you are cooking, cover them with salt, both on top of the stove and in the oven, as soon as possible. Later removal, when surfaces are cool, will be a snap. For more obstinate spills, check your manual's instructions. I use Scotch-Brite's scratchproof Dobie cleaning pad with a paste of baking soda or Bon Ami. Rinse well and dry. Avoid using ammonia on stove surfaces; it can



High-end kitchen appliances will last longer with periodic cleaning. Tiny wire brushes, \$3 to \$6, from Gracious Home, NYC. 212-231-7800.

discolor some metal. For weekly upkeep, wash burner grates in the dishwasher along with hob caps and other removable parts. With a crevice tool, vacuum dried bits of food and wash the surface of the stove with a nontoxic degreaser such as Shaklee's Basic I ([shaklee.com](http://shaklee.com)). The inside of a range should be inspected once a month and cleaned with a generous spray of Basic I. Cover the kitchen floor underneath the stove with a waterproof drop cloth and leave the liquid to work overnight. In the morning, wipe clean and rinse well. Never use commercial cleaning products on self-cleaning ovens. Just use a water-dampened rag to remove any residue after the oven has cooled.

■ **DISHWASHER** The key to prolonging the life of a dishwasher is to avoid clogging. That's why I always rinse dishes before inserting them in the dishwasher. Some machines have a filter, which should be inspected every week. Shake it in a trash can to remove any debris. (Wear rubber gloves

if you find broken glass shards.) Wash the filter in warm, sudsy water and brush it clean. Once a week, wipe the dishwasher's sides and exterior clean with Windex or plain water and soap. Twice a year, I clean the interior of my dishwasher by pouring a cup of white vinegar into the bottom. Put the machine through the wash and rinse cycles, but shut it off before it goes into the dry cycle.

■ **STOVE HOOD** Most ventilation hoods have aluminum filters that can be cleaned in the dishwasher on the pots-and-pans cycle. Check the filter monthly, and remove it to clean when greasy. At the same time, clean the fan blade behind the filter. (Remember to shut off the electric current first.) Again, Basic I is an excellent choice here. Unfortunately, if you cook a lot, some grease will remain trapped in the ductwork. A technician with steam-cleaning equipment can resolve this problem. Consult your Yellow Pages and schedule him once a year. Your range hood's interior and exterior will benefit from a wipe down with your favorite cleanser on a weekly basis.