



HOMEMADE ECO-CLEANERS

DIY Recipes Keep Your Home Naturally Clean

by Lane Vail

Americans use 35 million pounds of toxic household cleaning products annually. According to the Children's Health Environmental Coalition, in Los Angeles, traces of cleaning chemicals can be found throughout the human body within seconds of exposure, posing risks like asthma, allergies, cancer, reproductive toxicity, hormone disruption, neurotoxicity and death.

Equally sobering is the decades of research suggesting a relationship between the overuse of powerful disinfectants and the rise of antibiotic-resistant super bacteria like methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), as well as concerns over these toxins entering water supplies and wildlife food chains.

Cleaning product labels lack transparency, says Johanna Congleton, Ph.D., a senior scientist for the Environmental Working Group, because "manufacturers aren't required to specify ingredients."

One approach to assure safe ingredients is do-it-yourself (DIY) products. For Matt and Beby Jabz, the authors of *DIY Natural Household Cleaners* who blog at DIYNatural.com, creating homemade cleaners is a rewarding exercise in sustainability and simplicity. "We're cutting through all the marketing and getting back to basics," says Matt. Affordability is another benefit:

The Jabz' homemade laundry detergent costs five cents per load, compared with 21 cents for a store brand.

Annie B. Bond, a bestselling author and pioneering editor of the award-winning *Green Guide*, dispels a DIY myth: "What's time-consuming isn't making the cleaners; it's making the decision to switch and figuring it all out," she says.

Nine Basics

Find these multitasking ingredients in local groceries and health stores or online.

White vinegar effectively cleans, deodorizes, cuts grease and disinfects against bacteria, viruses and mold.

Castile soap in liquid or bar form serves as a biodegradable, vegetable-based surfactant and all-around cleaner (avoid mixing with vinegar, which neutralizes its cleansing properties).

Baking soda cleans, whitens, neutralizes odors and softens water. It's an excellent scrubbing agent for bathrooms, refrigerators and ovens.

Borax, a natural mineral, improves the effectiveness of laundry soap. Although classified (as is salt) as a low-level health hazard that should be kept away from children and animals, borax is non-carcinogenic and isn't absorbed through skin.

Washing soda, a caustic chemical cousin of baking soda, softens water and removes stains. Bond advises, "It's a heavy duty cleaner as powerful as any toxic solvent," so wear gloves.

Hydrogen peroxide is considered an effective disinfectant and bleach alternative by the Environmental Protection Agency. Use it to whiten grout and remove stains.

Essential oils derived from plants infuse cleaners with fragrance and boost germ-fighting power. Tea tree, eucalyptus and lavender oils all boast antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties. The Jabz advise that although they can be pricey, "The investment will pay for itself many times over."

Lemon juice or citric acid cuts through grease, removes mold and bacteria and leaves dishes streak-free.

Coarse kosher salt helps soften dishwasher water and acts as a scouring agent.

Home Formulas

All-purpose cleaner: *Homemade Cleaners: Quick-and-Easy Toxin-Free Recipes*, by Mandy O'Brien and Dionna Ford, suggests combining one cup of vinegar, one cup of water and 15 drops of lemon oil in a spray bottle. Use it anywhere, including glass and mirrors. For serious disinfecting, follow with a hydrogen peroxide spray.

Foaming hand/dish soap: Shake one cup of water, a quarter-cup of castile soap and 15 drops of essential oil in a foaming dispenser. Use in bathrooms and kitchens.

Dishwashing detergent: *DIYNatural* recommends mixing one cup of borax, one cup of washing soda, a half-cup of citric acid and a half-cup of coarse kosher salt. Leave it uncovered for several days, stirring often to prevent clumping. Cover and refrigerate. Use one tablespoon per load with a half-cup of citric acid in the rinse to combat streaks.

Laundry detergent: Combine one cup of borax, one cup of washing soda and one 14-ounce bar of grated castile soap. Use one tablespoon per load, adding a half-cup of lemon juice to the rinse cycle. Prior to washing, use hydrogen peroxide as a stain remover (test first; it may lift color).

More than 95 percent of "green" products manipulate labels by providing irrelevant information (declaring a product is free of an already illegal chemical), being vague (masking poisons as natural ingredients), outright lying (claiming false endorsements) and other maneuvers.

— TerraChoice Group

Bathroom soft scrub: Bond recommends creating a thick paste with liquid castile soap and a half-cup of baking soda. Scour tubs, showers and stainless steel surfaces with a sponge, and then rinse.

Toilet bowl cleaner: Sprinkle one cup of borax into the toilet at bedtime and then clean the loosened grime with a brush the next morning, advises Bond. Wipe outer surfaces with the all-purpose spray.

Wood polish: Bond recommends mixing a quarter-cup of vinegar or lemon juice with a few drops of olive and lemon oil.

Hard floor cleaner: *Environmental Working Group's DIY Cleaning Guide* suggests combining a half-gallon of hot water with one cup of white vinegar in a bucket to mop.

Carpet cleaner: Freshen rugs by sprinkling baking soda at night and vacuuming in the morning, suggests Bond. For deeper cleaning, combine one cup of vinegar and two-and-a-half gallons of water in a steam cleaner.

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Cloth Tools Replace Paper

by Lane Vail

Americans, comprising less than 5 percent of the world's population, use 30 percent of the world's paper, according to the Worldwatch Institute. Some 13 billion pounds of this comes from paper towels, mostly landfilled because grime-soaked paper is non-recyclable.

Ecological and economical alternatives include cloth dishrags, towels, napkins, wipes and handkerchiefs plus washable diapers and menstrual pads. Jean Calleja, co-owner of the Eco Laundry Company, in New York City, suggests customers buy recycled, organic, unbleached cloths and local products when possible.

In the kitchen: Use washcloths or repurpose cotton T-shirts into 10-by-10-inch squares to use regularly with a homemade all-purpose cleaner on surfaces. Replace paper towels with cloth towels for drying hands.

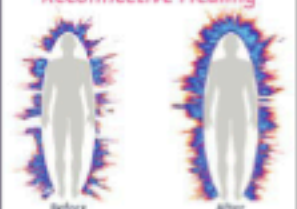
At the table: Cloth napkins enhance mealtime. Buy or make plain napkins (by hemming cotton fabric squares) for everyday use and celebrate holidays with fancy-patterned fabric rolled into napkin rings.

In the bathroom: Substitute chlorine-laden disinfecting wipes with homemade reusable ones. *DIYNatural.com* recommends mixing three-quarters of a cup of white vinegar, three-quarters of a cup of water and 25 drops of essential oil in a glass mason jar. Stuff five to seven washcloths into the jar, seal with a lid and shake, so the solution is absorbed into each wipe. Pull out a ready-made disinfecting wipe for a quick clean.

Laundrying linens: Change cleaning rags often, hang-drying them thoroughly before adding to the laundry basket. Wash kitchen and bathroom rags (added to the bathroom towel load) separately each week. According to Calleja, "Pre-soaking rags overnight in a non-toxic, chlorine-free, whitening solution can make a huge difference in getting them clean." Combine a half-cup of hydrogen peroxide with two to three gallons of water, spot-testing every fabric first for colorfastness. Calleja also likes using a white vinegar and eucalyptus oil rinse aid to dissolve soap residue, soften fabric and leave a fresh scent.

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