



Aqualog

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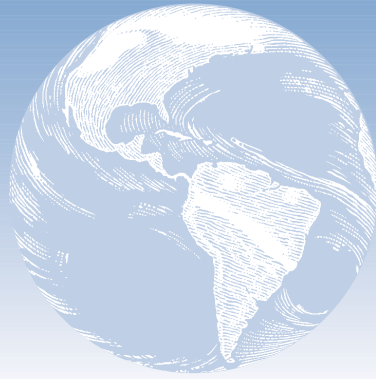
**Green Cleaning: Which
Cleaning Products Are
Earth Friendly?**

**Plus...More Animal
Rescue Stories**



Green Cleaning





Safe Cleaning Supplies for You and Our Blue Planet

—by Cristina Santiestevan

April showers must mean it's time for spring cleaning. But, before you grab that mop and bucket, consider what products you will be using to clean your home.

Many of today's most popular cleaners contain chemical irritants and toxins that are bad for you and the environment, especially when they are disposed of improperly. To make matters more confusing, commercial cleaners are not well regulated, which makes it difficult to identify safe, natural cleaners. Phrases like biodegradable, non-toxic, hypoallergenic and fragrance free don't mean much because companies are not required to prove these statements or list their ingredients.

Several companies recognize that people are becoming increasingly more aware of their impact on the environment and now offer safe, natural cleaning products. Some of these companies include Ecover (www.ecover.com), Seventh Generation (www.seventhgeneration.com) and method (www.methodhome.com). But if you really want peace of mind, try mixing your own cleaning solutions at home. It's quick and easy, better for you and the planet, and will save you money. Don't be daunted—you'll be green cleaning in no time.

Essential green cleaning supplies

First, you will need to stock up on a few supplies. You probably have most of these items in your home already, and anything you need to buy will be inexpensive and easy to find.

Spray bottles

You will need several spray bottles for your homemade cleaning solutions. Look for ones with measurements along their sides—this will make it much easier to mix the solutions. Avoid the temptation to reuse spray bottles from commercial cleaners—the chemicals may linger even after a washing with soap and water.

Cloth towels or rags

You can buy special cleaning cloths, but rags made from old t-shirts, sweatshirts and socks will work just as well.



And you'll save paper by avoiding the paper towels.

Newspaper

Old, crumpled newspapers are the secret to absorbing spills and getting streak-free windows. Save a stack of newspapers for window-washing day, or for unexpected messes.

Baking soda

Left in an open container, baking soda makes a fine air freshener or refrigerator deodorizer. Add a half-cup to your washing machine to eliminate odors on clothing, or sprinkle it on your carpet as a deodorizer. Baking soda can also be used as a non-abrasive cleanser, and works wonders at removing baked-on

residue at the bottom of your oven. Moisten baking soda with enough water to form a thick paste, and spread it all over the bottom of your oven. Let sit overnight and use a sponge to wipe it all away in the morning.

Hydrogen peroxide

Hydrogen peroxide should be in everyone's home cleaning kit. It's a disinfectant, antiseptic and a natural, non-chlorine bleach. Spot treat your clothes with hydrogen peroxide to remove all manner of stains—including blood stains—or add up to a cup to your laundry as a natural bleach. Since this is a bleaching agent, be careful with colors.

Lemon juice

Try using fresh lemons or bottled lemon juice to cut through grease, clean windows, polish brass



and copper, or as a natural bleach. Lemon juice can also be added to cleaning solutions for a lemony-fresh scent. Add a half-cup of lemon juice to the rinse cycle to brighten clothes.



Opt for plain soap and water to wash your hands—skip the antibacterial products.

Liquid soap

Use a natural, vegetable oil based soap—also known as castile soap—to scrub away dirt and stains. Dr. Bronner's is a popular brand. You will find this in most grocery or natural food stores.

White vinegar

This multi-use ingredient cuts grease, removes dirt and tarnish, dissolves solids and absorbs odors. Straight vinegar will kill more than 80% of mold spores and germs, and nearly 100% of all bacteria. Add a quarter-cup of vinegar to the rinse cycle to soften fabrics and eliminate static cling. Use vinegar to remove lingering odors from food storage containers and more—simply soak the item

in vinegar for a few hours or overnight. Freshen up your trash-can by spraying the inside of it with straight vinegar and letting it evaporate.

Recipes & solutions

Now that you have your supplies, it is time to get cleaning!

All-purpose spray cleaner

Mix one part vinegar with four parts water and a splash of lemon juice in a plastic spray bottle. This is the first bottle to reach for when cleaning just about any mess. It works on kitchen counters, sinks, windows, sticky messes on dining room tables, spills on stoves and much more. For stubborn stains, allow the solution to sit for a few minutes before wiping it up. Use newspapers to dry your windows, and cloth rags for everything else.

Safe scrub

Mix baking soda with liquid soap to make a gentle scrub for minor clean-up jobs. For tougher jobs, combine equal parts baking soda and coarse salt with enough water to form a thick paste. Spread the scrub using a brush, sponge or rag. Either scrub will clean bathtubs, sinks, toilets, tile, ovens and anything else. For tough stains, allow the paste to sit for several minutes to several hours.

Air freshener

An open container of baking soda or vinegar with lemon juice will do an excellent job removing most airborne

odors. For stubborn smells, simmer water with cinnamon or other spices on the stove. Open windows and fresh breezes work wonders for clearing away old, stale smells. Houseplants naturally remove odors and small particles from the air.

Floor cleaner and polish

All floors are all easily and effectively cleaned with an equal mix of white vinegar and warm water. Add lemon juice for a fresh citrus scent. To preserve and polish linoleum or vinyl floors, add a splash of baby oil to the cleaning solution. Polish freshly cleaned wood floors with a thin coat of equal parts vinegar and baby oil.

Mold remover

Mix one part hydrogen peroxide with three parts water in a plastic spray bottle. Spray over the entire affected area, and let sit for at least one hour before rinsing. Straight vinegar will also kill many types of mold. As with the hydrogen peroxide mix, let the vinegar sit for at least an hour before rinsing.

Clothing stain fighter

Mix equal parts hydrogen peroxide and liquid soap in a small bowl or plastic spray bottle. Lightly cover the stained area, and let sit. Gently rinse the solution away after 15-45 minutes. Repeat as necessary. This may take several applications, but keep with it—it can even remove red wine stains. Caution: Hydrogen peroxide is a bleaching agent. Test this solution on a small section of the garment

if you are worried about color loss.

Furniture polish

Lemon juice mixed in equal parts with olive oil works wonders for unvarnished wood. For varnished wood, dilute the solution with water. Use a soft cloth to spread.

Drain cleaner

Pour about a half-cup of baking soda down the drain, followed by a half-cup of vinegar. The resulting reaction (foaming) will break down accumulated soap scum, which often clogs drains.

After 15 minutes, pour hot or boiling water down the drain to clear any remaining residue. If you have plastic pipes, skip the boiling water.

Caution: Do not use this method if you have already tried a chemical drain cleaner. The vinegar may react with the drain cleaner, releasing toxic fumes.

Metal polishes

Silver: Line a saucepan with aluminum foil and fill with water. Add a teaspoon of salt and baking soda, and bring to a boil. Once boiling, add your silver for a minute or two. Remove, and dry with a soft cloth.

Brass and copper: Use a soft cloth soaked in a solution of lemon juice and baking soda or vinegar and salt.

Gold: Clean with a paste of salt, vinegar and flour.

Stainless steel and chrome: Clean with a cloth soaked in vinegar.

What to avoid

There are a few especially nasty products out there that deserve special mention. The top three to avoid are chlorine bleach, ammonia and *anything* labeled antibacterial. All three are linked with known health risks and/or environmental consequences, and none are necessary for standard cleaning chores.

Chlorine bleach

Chlorine bleach can burn skin and eyes, cause respiratory problems, lead to liver or kidney damage and interfere with the immune system. The fumes can interfere with fetal development, and the liquid can be fatal if swallowed. Chlorine bleach may combine with natural substances or commercial products to create toxic gases or known carcinogens. Liquid chlorine bleach is the most common cleaner accidentally swallowed by children.

Chlorine may lurk in all manner of commercial home-cleaning products, including laundry detergent and bleach, disinfectants, scouring powders and toilet bowl cleaners. Luckily, alternatives are available. Hydrogen peroxide is a safe non-chlorine bleach. Vinegar is an excellent disinfectant. Baking soda mixed with coarse salt is an effective scouring solution and will work wonders cleaning your toilet and bathtub.

Ammonia

Low levels of ammonia occur naturally, and will not cause any health problems. However, concentrated ammonia used in many household cleaners can cause eye, throat or nose irritation, headache, nausea and vomiting. High concentrations can lead to serious burns or eye damage. Repeated or prolonged exposure to ammonia fumes may slowly damage the eyes, liver, kidneys and lungs, and may lead to bronchitis. Children and people with asthma or emphysema are most sensitive to ammonia.

Ammonia is most commonly used in glass, window, metal and oven cleaners. Cigarette smoke and many chemical-based fertilizers also contain ammonia. As with chlorine bleach, safe and effective alternatives exist. Vinegar and lemon juice clean glass and most metals extremely well, and a paste of baking soda and salt will remove baked-on messes on your stove or in your oven.

Antibacterial products

These products seem like a great idea—antibacterial soaps and disinfectants are advertised as the essential ingredient for every clean home. But the advertisements are misleading. Most bacteria are not bad for us.

Antibacterial products are no more effective than vinegar at controlling bacteria and do not kill viruses—which cause the common cold and flu—and cannot prevent the spread of contagious diseases. Antibacterial soaps work no better than regular soap, and are generally harsher and more drying to our skin. Also, ingredients in antibacterial soaps have been shown to last through wastewater treatment and accumulate in municipal sludge, which is later used as fertilizer for crops. So essentially, we wash this stuff down the drain, it doesn't go away even after the water is treated, and then we eat a portion of it in our produce.

Antibacterial ingredients are common in soaps, disinfectants and cleaners, and are now becoming available in trash bags, sponges, plastic wrap, disposable cutting boards and more. As unlikely as it sounds, we need bacteria. Beneficial bacteria help us digest our food, fight off

infection, absorb calcium and other minerals and produce essential vitamins. This means antibacterial products could be making us sicker, not healthier, because we kill essential beneficial bacteria every time we use them.

Most frightening, the overuse of antibiotics and antibacterial products may be leading to the development of antibiotic-resistant super-bacteria. While antibacterial products kill many bacteria, a few always survive. These survivors are stronger and more resistant. Already, doctors and scientists have noticed that certain strains of bacteria—which can cause infections—are able to resist antibiotic treatments that once worked to control them. Many worry that some bacteria will eventually be able to resist every known antibiotic treatment, resulting in uncontrollable super-bacteria.

For all of these reasons, it is best to avoid any product labeled antibacterial. These products should only be used in special circumstances, such as in hospitals and doctor's offices. Plain soap and warm water is still the best way to wash your hands and clean up—even after working with raw meat in the kitchen. ●

