
Non-Toxic Cleaning

Green Cleaning

Many of the cleaners we have in our homes contain chemicals that can be hazardous to people, pets and the environment. Perchloroethylene, found in many spot and carpet cleaners, is known to cause cancer in animals and is considered a possible human carcinogen. Other chemicals, such as phenol in disinfectants, can cause kidney and liver damage. Envirosense has a more complete list of the potential hazards found in household cleaners.

Making your own household cleaners is a good way to both save money and protect your family from potentially toxic chemicals. However, even non-toxic cleaners are still cleaners, and need to be properly labelled and stored away from children.

Ingredients: What You'll Need

BAKING SODA (sodium bicarbonate) Excellent odor absorbent and mild abrasive. Found in the baking section of the grocery store.

BORAX (known as 20 Mule Team Borax) A strong alkaline, eye irritant and toxic if swallowed. Keep all borax-containing cleaners out of the reach of children. Found in the laundry detergent section of the grocery store. Disinfects, deodorizes and inhibits mold growth.

ESSENTIAL OILS Mostly used for deodorizing or scenting cleaners. Essential oils, such as mint, eucalyptus, lavender, lemon, and tea tree, can be found in health food stores or herbal supply shops. Tea tree oil* is currently in the process of being registered as a disinfectant in this country.

GLYCERIN Found in pharmacies or health food stores. An ingredient in stain removing recipes because it helps oil mix with water.

HYDROGEN PEROXIDE Use the household concentration (3%) typically found in pharmacies. An antiseptic, useful in kitchens and bathrooms.

LIQUID SOAP Vegetable-based soap sometimes referred to as castile soap. Found in most health food stores. Dr. Bonners is a popular one.

LIQUID DETERGENT Detergents are made from synthetic materials that form less soap scum when combined with minerals in hard water. Most dishwashing liquids are detergents. Try purchasing vegetable oil-based detergents, which can be less toxic than petroleum-based products. Vegetable oil-based detergents can be found in health food stores.

VINEGAR Removes soap scum, grease, and mineral deposits and acts as a deodorizer. Use only white distilled vinegar for these recipes.

WASHING SODA (sodium carbonate) It is slightly caustic and a great grease cutter. Don't use it on waxed floors (unless you want to remove the wax), fiberglass, or aluminum. Found in the laundry detergent sections, made by Arm & Hammer.

*Note: These ingredients may be toxic in their concentrated form. When used in small amounts in these cleaning recipes, they are non-toxic.

FLOOR CLEANERS

All Purpose Floor Cleaner

2 tablespoons liquid soap or detergent

1 gallon hot water

Mix, mop, and wipe clean.

No-Wax Floor Cleaner
All Purpose Recipe (above)

1/4 cup vinegar

Mix, mop, and wipe clean.

Tile Floor Cleaner

1 cup vinegar

1 gallon hot water

Mix, mop and wipe clean.

TIP: To remove scuff marks, sprinkle with baking soda and spray with equal parts vinegar and water. Wipe clean.

Wood Floor Polish

1/4 cup olive oil

1/4 cup vinegar

10 drops essential oil (optional)

Mix and apply. Wipe clean.

LIVING ROOM

Glass Cleaner

1/8 cup vinegar

1 cup water

Mix ingredients in a spray bottle. Shake and apply. Wipe clean.

--or--

2 tablespoons borax or washing soda

Mix ingredients. Apply to surface. Wipe clean.

Leather Cleaner

1/2 cup olive oil

1/4 cup vinegar

Mix in a squirt bottle and shake before each application. Rub with cloth into leather for cleaning and conditioning.

DO NOT USE ON SUEDE.

Wood Furniture Polish
3/4 cup olive or mineral oil

1/4 cup vinegar

1/2 teaspoon lemon oil (optional)

Mix thoroughly in a squirt bottle. Shake well and squirt on furniture or rag and rub into wood.

Carpet Deodorizer
1 pound box baking soda

1 teaspoon essential oil

Mix using a fork to work out lumps. Sprinkle on carpet. Vacuum after 1 hour.

Carpet & Upholstery Stain Remover

1/4 cup liquid detergent

1/4 cup glycerin

1 1/2 cups water

Mix and pour into a squirt bottle. Use sparingly and rub on stain.

--or--

Club soda

Dish detergent

Blot stain with club soda then scrub with a dab of dish detergent.

--or--

Equal parts vinegar and water

Mix and use to remove tough stains including grass, perspiration, rust, jam, coffee, orange juice, wine, beer, ketchup, barbeque sauce, chili, urine and pet stains.

TIP: Never use warm or hot water on stains containing sugar!

LAUNDRY

Laundry Soap

Use non-phosphate detergent.

TIP: Add 1/2 cup borax or washing soda to the wash cycle to boost cleaning for heavily soiled clothes.

Fabric Softener

Vinegar

Add 1-2 cups of vinegar to rinse cycle to deodorize and soften fabrics.

Bleach

Hydrogen peroxide (3%)

Spot clean. Let dry. Repeat if necessary.

--or--

1/2 cup borax

Presoak in mixture of 1/2 cup borax in 2 gallons of hot water.

Diaper Pail Deodorizer

1 cup baking soda

1 teaspoon tea tree oil and/or

other essential oil

Mix and work out all lumps with a fork. Sprinkle in bottom of pail after liner is removed. Periodically rinse pail with vinegar and water and dry in the sun.

Laundry Stain Removers

1/4 cup liquid detergent

1/4 cup glycerin

1 1/2 cups water

Mix and pour into a squirt bottle. Use sparingly and run on stain. Wash. TIP: Do not use hot or warm water on sugary stains. Wash and rinse in cool water only.

--or--

Equal parts vinegar and water

Mix and use to remove tough stains including grass, perspiration, rust, jam, coffee, orange juice, wine, beer, ketchup, barbecue sauce, chili, urine and pet stains.

METAL CLEANERS

Brass & Copper Cleaner

2/3 cup vinegar

2/3 cup flour

1/2 cup salt

In a glass bowl, mix vinegar and flour. Add salt and stir. Spread on tarnished metal. Wait 1-2 hours. Rinse, dry and polish with a soft cloth and a dab of olive oil.

Chrome Cleaner

1/2 cup baking soda

1-2 tablespoons water

Mix to form a paste. Apply with sponge and rinse well.

Silver Cleaner

3-inch square of aluminum foil

1 tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon baking soda

1 cup warm water

Dissolve salt and baking soda in warm water. Submerge the foil and silver in the solution. Wait one hour. Rinse silver and wipe dry with a soft cloth.

--or--

Use a non-gel toothpaste and rub tarnished spots with soft cloth and rinse.

BATHROOM

Tub & Tile Cleaner

1 2/3 cup water

1/4 cup liquid soap

1/4 cup baking soda

2 tablespoons vinegar

A few drops of essential oil (optional)

Add soap to water and let dissolve. Stir in baking soda, then add vinegar. Store in a squirt bottle and shake before using. Rinse thoroughly to avoid leaving a residue.

Mold and Mildew
Equal parts vinegar and water

Spray and wipe clean.

Plastic Shower Curtain
2 cups water

Laundry detergent

Machine launder along with a few towels. Air dry. To keep clean, spray weekly with a mixture of borax and water.

Antiseptic Soap Spray
3 tablespoons liquid soap

20-30 drops tea tree oil

2 cups water

Mix in spray bottle and apply.

TIP: Hydrogen peroxide (3%) by itself may also be used as a mild antiseptic.

Bathroom Deodorizer
One pound box baking soda

10-20 drops essential oil

Mix oil in baking soda. Place open box under sink or near toilet. Add more essential oil as needed. Replace baking soda every 3 months. Use the old baking soda in cleaning recipes.

Toilet Bowl Cleaner
Tub and Tile Cleaner (above)

1/4 teaspoon tea tree oil (optional)

--or--

1/4 cup borax

Sprinkle on a wet bowl brush, scour and rinse. Clean bowl thoroughly and often.

TIP: Drain water from the toilet bowl for better cleaning. For serious stains or rust, empty water out of bowl and scrub with a wet pumice stone. When wet, the stone will not scratch porcelain.

KITCHEN

All Purpose Cleaner

2 tablespoons vinegar

1 teaspoon borax or washing soda

2 cups hot water

1/4 cup liquid soap

Mix everything but soap in a spray bottle and shake. Add 1/4 cup liquid soap last. Mix gently. Apply and wipe clean. Good for counters, wood work, appliances, etc.

Dish Soap

Use non-phosphate detergent

TIP: use half the recommended amount of detergent in your automatic dishwasher.

Scouring Powder

Baking soda

Pour in shaker and sprinkle in sink or on pans.

Scrub with a rough pad and rinse.

Scouring Paste

2/3 cup baking soda

1/2 cup liquid soap or detergent

2 tablespoons vinegar

Mix soda and soap to form a paste. Add vinegar and stir. Keep paste in a tub at the kitchen sink for scouring pots and pans or the sink itself.

Stain Remover

Salt

Juice of lemon or lime

Sprinkle surface with salt and squeeze lemon or lime juice over the area. Let sit and rub out. This can even remove rust if allowed to sit a few hours.

TIP: A wet pumice stone can remove tough stains from porcelain or enamel without scratching.

Drain Cleaner

1/2 cup baking soda

1/2 cup vinegar

Pour baking soda down the drain followed by vinegar. Let it bubble for 15 minutes, then pour down a teakettle full of boiling water. For stubborn clogs, use a mechanical snake.

Garbage Pail Deodorizer

1 teaspoon tea tree oil

1 cup baking soda

Mix and work out all the lumps with a fork. Sprinkle in bottom of pail after liner is removed. Periodically rinse pail with vinegar and water and let dry in the sun.

Oven Cleaner

1 tablespoon liquid soap

1/2 cup water

1/4 cup salt

3/4 cup baking soda

Spray oven surfaces with soapy water. Mix salt and baking soda and sprinkle on wet surface. Spray again so that the mixture is damp and pasty. Let stand overnight. Scrape off with putty knife or wet pumice stone.

TIP: Prevention is the key to a clean oven. Line your oven with foil or aluminum oven liner found in the baking section of grocery stores.

The above recipes were taken from the Windham Solid Waste Management District .

Additional Links

Instructions for making a Green Cleaning Kit.

Kids can take a tour of their house with the EPA, identifying toxic materials as they go.

Adults can take advantage of a program designed by EPA and Purdue University to help identify ways to reduce waste and save money in their homes.