

A Guide to Safer Household Cleaners



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INTRODUCTION

It seems that we are all leading busy lives these days. Time is scarce and there are few opportunities for household chores. Manufacturers have responded to our busy lifestyles by making convenient products that offer instant results and promises to make our lives much easier.

But many commercial cleaners contain mixtures of complex and synthetic compounds. Some of these chemicals are highly hazardous when improperly used or disposed. They could burn skin or eyes on contact. Without proper ventilation, chemicals can also produce harmful fumes. Some chemicals in products are so harmful that even a small amount could be deadly if swallowed.

Thoughtless disposal of hazardous products can have harmful impacts on people and the environment. Disposal in the trash, or pouring them down the drain, can disrupt waste water systems, seriously injure waste handlers, and contaminate local air and water resources. Used motor oil, antifreeze and other hazardous wastes – even small amounts – have a profound effect on the environment, which in turn will affect you and future generations. Remember – it's all connected!

Many household chores can be accomplished by using products that are commonly found in our homes. This brochure offers non-toxic and safer, less toxic cleaning recipes. They can work just as well as their commercial counterparts, but you may have to use a little more elbow grease. Best of all, you know what is going in them, and they tend to cost less than ready-made products.

A word of warning: even common household products can be hazardous, especially if mixed together. Use published recipes according to directions.

NEVER MIX PRODUCTS WITH AMMONIA AND CHLORINE (BLEACH), THEY FORM A DEADLY GAS!

BATHROOM

GROUT CLEANER

3 cups baking soda
1 cup warm water
Mix into paste, scrub into grout with a toothbrush.
Rinse with clean water.

MOLD & MILDEW

Equal parts white vinegar and water.
Mix and apply. Wipe clean.

SCOURING POWDER

1 cup baking soda
¼ cup white vinegar
Mix in small bowl and rub on surface with damp
sponge. Let stand a few minutes. Rinse well.

SHOWERHEAD

½ cup white vinegar
1 quart water
Submerge metal shower head in solution and boil
15 minutes. Submerge plastic head in 1 pint white
vinegar and 1 pint warm water for 1 hour.

TOILET BOWL

Baking soda.
Sprinkle baking soda like you would scouring powder.
Scrub with a damp sponge. Rinse with water.

Baking soda
White Vinegar
Sprinkle baking soda into the bowl, then drizzle with
white vinegar and scour with a toilet brush.

TUB & TILE CLEANER

½ teaspoon washing soda
¼ to ½ teaspoon vegetable oil-based liquid soap
3 tablespoons white vinegar
2 cups hot water
Mix ingredients into a spray bottle or pail.
Apply and wipe clean.

KITCHEN

ALL PURPOSE CLEANER

1 teaspoon vegetable oil-based
liquid soap, squeeze of lemon or splash of white
vinegar, 1-quart warm water.
Mix, apply then wipe clean.

DEPOSIT CLEANER

Cover mineral deposits around faucets with
strips of paper towel soaked in white vinegar. Let it
set for 1 hour.

DRAIN CLEANERS

If the drain is clogged, use a plunger or rent a mechanical snake to manually push the clog away.

½ cup salt

½ cup baking soda

Pour salt down drain, follow with baking soda and 6 cups of boiling water. Let sit overnight and then flush with water.

FLOOR CLEANERS

Tile Floors

1 cup white vinegar

1 pail hot water

Mix and apply. Wipe clean.

Wood Floors

¼ cup olive oil

¼ cup white vinegar

drop of lemon oil

Mix and apply. Wipe clean.

No-Wax Floors

¼ cup vegetable oil-based liquid soap

¼ cup lemon juice

2 gallons hot water

Mix and apply. Wipe clean.

KITCHEN & METAL CLEANERS

FLOOR WAX

1 part lemon juice

2 parts food grade linseed oil

Apply with a rag. Let rest until floor is dry. Buff completely smooth.

6 tablespoons beeswax

3 cups food grade linseed oil

Put ingredients in the top of a double boiler (over water), and heat slowly until wax is melted. Stir and pour into a heat resistant container then apply.

Linoleum Floors

Add a small amount of skim milk to rinse water. This will shine the floor. (Don't worry, it doesn't smell)

**OVEN
CLEANERS**

Small box of baking soda, water, a few drops of vegetable oil-based liquid soap and a mild abrasive pad. Sprinkle water over bottom of oven. Cover with baking soda. Let sit, preferably overnight. Wipe with pad. After bottom is cleaned, put a few drops of liquid soap on a sponge and waste the sides and top.

**BRASS &
COPPER**

Flour (enough to make a paste)
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup white vinegar
Mix ingredients to form a paste. Rub onto brass and let sit for 30 minutes. Rinse with water and dry with a cloth dampened with a little vegetable oil.

**CHROME
CLEANER**

3 tablespoons baking soda and water.
Mix then baking soda and water to make a paste.
Apply then rinse.

LIVING ROOM

GLASS CLEANER

1/8 cup white vinegar
1 cup water
Mix ingredients in a spray bottle.
Shake and apply. Wipe clean.

2 tablespoons borax or washing soda
3 cups water
Mix ingredients in a bowl. Apply to surface and wipe clean.

3 tablespoons cornstarch
½ cup water
Mix ingredients in a bowl. Dip a cotton cloth into mixture and wipe. Film will disappear, so keep rubbing.

**CARPET
DEODORIZER**

Box of baking soda
Sprinkle baking soda over carpet and let sit overnight.
Vacuum.

1 cup borax
2 cups cornmeal
Mix ingredients in a bowl, sprinkle over carpet. Let stand for an hour. Vacuum.

Club soda
Apply to stain and scrub.

¼ cup white vinegar
¼ cup water
Mix and rub. Rinse with water.

¼ cup liquid detergent
¼ cup glycerin
1 ½ cups water
Mix and pour into a squirt bottle. Use sparingly and rub on stains.

FURNITURE CLEANER

For Wood

⅛ cup linseed oil
⅛ cup white vinegar
¼ cup lemon juice
Mix ingredients. Use a soft cloth to rub into wood.

¾ cup olive oil
¼ cup white vinegar
Mix ingredients. Use a soft cloth to rub into wood.

¼ cup olive oil
⅛ cup lemon juice
Mix and apply a thin coat. Rub with a cloth.

For Leather

¼ cup olive oil
a few drops of lemon oil
Mix ingredients. Saturate cloth and apply.

½ cup olive oil
¼ cup white 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

For Vinyl

¼ cup white vinegar
¼ teaspoon vegetable oil-based liquid soap
water
Mix ingredients. Saturate cloth and apply.

LAUNDRY

FABRIC SOFTENER

Add 1 cup of white vinegar or ¼ cup baking soda to final rinse. **(Do not use with Chlorine Bleach – it will produce toxic vapor)**

LAUNDRY BLEACH

Add ¼ cup of lemon juice to wash.

LAUNDRY SOAP

Use non-phosphate liquid detergents or laundry soaps.

LAUNDRY STARCH

1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 pint cold water
Place in spray bottle and shake to dissolve cornstarch.

FABRIC STAIN REMOVAL

Grease

Apply a paste of cornstarch and water.
Brush off when dry or scrub spot with toothbrush.

Ink

Saturate stain with milk or sponge with alcohol. Apply a paste of cream of tartar and lemon juice. Let set for 1 hour.

Lipstick

Rub cold cream or shortening to dissolve color; rinse area with solution washing soda and warm water. Then wash in soapy water.

Perspiration

Sponge stain with a weak solution of white vinegar or lemon juice; or soak fabric in water with two dissolved tablets of aspirin.

PESTS

HOUSE

Ants

Equal parts white vinegar and water.
Mix and apply to countertops, cabinets and floors.

Pour a line of red chili powder, cayenne pepper, paprika, or dried peppermint at points of entry.

Fleas and Ticks

1 teaspoon white vinegar
1 quart water (per 40 pound of pet weight)
Mix and add to pet's drinking water to keep your pet free of fleas and ticks.

Flies

Scratch the skin of an orange and leave it out; the citrus acts as a repellent.

Plant mint around the home to repel flies.

Set a pot of basil on a windowsill or hang dried ground basil leaves in muslin bags.

Moths.

Place cedar chips in closets, drawers or closed containers to moth proof garments.

Make sachets of dried lavender or equal parts of rosemary and mint and place with garments.

Aphids, Mealybugs, Mites and White flies

3 tablespoons of liquid soap
1 gallon of water
Mix and spray plants with solution.

Moles

1 tablespoon castor oil
2 tablespoons liquid soap
Mix in blender until creamy, add 6 tablespoons water and blend again. Fill a garden sprinkling can with warm water and add 2 tablespoons of mixture and stir. Sprinkle immediately over infestation area. For best results apply after rain or thorough watering.

Mosquitoes

Plant basin around house or burn citronella candles.

Slugs and Snails

Fill a jar with stale beer and place the jar below ground level near garden. The fermented liquid will draw them and they will drown.

SHOPPING FOR ALTERNATIVES

How to Choose Products Wisely

Adopt a new way of thinking about potentially hazardous household products. Try to buy less or use non-hazardous products as much as possible. The best way to tell if a product is hazardous is to read the label. Look for these signal words.

WARNING! CORROSIVE!
DANGER! POISON!
IRRITANT! FLAMMABLE!

DANGER indicates the product is extremely hazardous; a taste could be fatal. **WARNING** and **CAUTION** signal a somewhat lesser hazard. Select products with a **CAUTION** label over those with **WARNING** or **DANGER**.

INGREDIENTS

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate): Excellent odor absorbent and mild abrasive. Found in the baking section of grocery stores.

Borax* (known as 20-mule team Borax): This is a strong alkaline, eye irritant and toxic if swallowed. Keep all Borax-containing cleaners out of reach of children. Found in the laundry detergent section of stores.

Essential Oils*: Mostly used for deodorizing or scenting cleaners. Essential oils, such as mint, eucalyptus, lavender, and lemon can be found in health food stores or herbal supply shops.

Glycerin: Found in pharmacies or health food stores.

Linseed of Flaxseed Oil (food grade): Found in health food stores.

Liquid Soap: Vegetable-based soap sometimes referred to as castile soap. Found in most health food stores.

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 section, 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.**

DISPOSAL

Residents can take unwanted household hazardous waste to the Regional Household Hazardous Waste Facility in Naperville. The facility is located at 1971 Brookdale Rd., at Naperville's Fire Station #4. For more information, call the Department of Economic Development and Planning at (630) 407-6700 or visit our website at www.dupageco.org/edp/ then click on "Waste, Recycling & Energy" for recycling and disposal information.

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