

low-impact living initiative



LILI

LILI information sheet natural cleaners

what are they?

Big manufacturers are constantly bringing out new 'improved' products, which are basically petroleum-based detergents whose ingredients are often toxic, non-renewable, and take a long time to biodegrade. You don't need such a range of products; you can buy green brands based on vegetable oils, or you can make your own cleaners from a few basic ingredients:

baking soda: dissolves dirt and grease in water; abrasive, so good for surfaces; neutralises acids and bases, so removes odours too.

washing soda: can only just be called non-toxic because of its high pH; use for very very stubborn stains (eg engine oil).

white (distilled) vinegar and *lemon juice*: nature's acidic grease cutters.

hydrogen peroxide: (3% conc. from chemists) a natural disinfectant produced by the human body and by the action of sunlight on water.

borax: mineral (sodium, boron, oxygen and water), formed when salt lakes evaporate. very low toxicity, yet an effective fungicide and anti-bacterial cleaning and bleaching agent.

cream of tartar: a natural leftover when grape juice is fermented into wine.

why are they good for the environment?

Ecover and Bio-D can provide washing-up liquid in refillable drums, from which you can re-



natural cleaners: clockwise from left – hydrogen peroxide (3%); borax; baking soda; cream of tartar; white vinegar; lemon juice; salt

fill bottles, so that you don't have to keep buying new ones. Making your own is even better (avoids the transport of all the water found in commercial products).

The bottom line is that they don't cause the health and environmental problems of synthetic chemicals when they end up in our bodies or down the drain. Over 70,000 synthetic chemicals are manufactured, and only 600 have been adequately tested (US Office of Environmental Affairs). This should change for 30,000 chemicals in 2005 due to EU legislation. The human body has not evolved to cope with exposure to so many chemicals; asthma and cancers are on the up, and sperm counts are falling. The cocktails of chemicals we use in our homes can't help. Here is just a tiny selection:

phosphates: (washing-up liquid, washing powders); too much for sewage system, leads to algal blooms in rivers.

paradichlorobenzene: (toilet blocks; deodorisers) possible carcinogenic.

chlorine: (bleaches) irritant, corrosive, can produce toxic gases when mixed with other cleaning fluids.

petrochemicals: (furniture polish, high-strength cleaners) eye, skin and respiratory irritant; can contain the carcinogen benzene.

sodium hypochlorite: (bleaches) corrosive, kills bacteria in sewage farms, eye, skin, respiratory irritant.

artificial musks: (air fresheners) liver toxin

formaldehyde: suspected carcinogen.

perchloroethylene: (dry cleaning) toxic air pollutant, probable carcinogen, a tiny amount will contaminate groundwater for many years.



green cleaning products: clockwise from left – toilet cleaner; cream cleaner; multi-purpose cleaner; washing soda; degreaser; laundry bleach; natural soap; washing-up liquid



what can I do?

Avoid products with these words on the container: chlorine, ethylene/ethyl, butyl/alkyl, benzene, phenol and formaldehyde. Buy green products or make your own:

all-purpose cleaner: soap and water; or two tablespoons of baking soda in a litre of water.

stain remover (surfaces): sprinkle with salt and lemon juice, leave for a while (a few hours for really bad stains) and wipe clean.

stubborn stains: as a paste, baking soda and a little water removes stubborn stains from coffee cups, doors, appliances etc.

carpet freshener: sprinkle baking soda before vacuuming.

eliminating odours: cat litter trays – baking soda; fridge – baking soda/water paste.

removing grease: vinegar (white) with salt.

disinfectant: (kitchen chopping boards, bathrooms and toilets) spray with white vinegar, then spray with hydrogen peroxide solution; wipe clean.

oven cleaner: make a paste with equal parts salt, baking soda and water, paste onto oven walls, leave for a while (overnight is good), then wipe off.

metal polish: vinegar or lemon juice (don't use baking soda on aluminium as it will attack it).

furniture polish: ½ cup lemon juice with a teaspoon of olive oil, apply with a soft rag.

window cleaner: 1 litre water, ¼ cup vinegar, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, shake, keep in spray bottle and use like ordinary window cleaner.

drain cleaner: ½ cup baking soda, then ½ cup vinegar, leave for 15 minutes, then pour down a kettle of boiling water.

washing dishes: buy green washing-up liquid (see 'where can I...?') – phosphate free.

air freshener: open the window; cut lemons or baking soda in a dish; in the kitchen, simmer cinnamon and cloves.

toilet cleaner: spray with vinegar and water mix around rim, pour cup of vinegar and couple of spoons baking soda into a bowl, leave for 15 mins, brush and flush.

rust remover: scour with cream of tartar.



air fresheners: pot pourri; baking soda; cut lemon; cinnamon and cloves (simmer to remove kitchen odours)

mould remover: spray with equal parts vinegar and water, leave for 5 minutes and wipe clean.

laundry liquid: green products (see 'where can I find out more?').

stain remover (clothes): equal parts vinegar and water; for grease, mix borax and water, rub in and wipe off.

laundry bleach: don't use chlorine-based bleaches; ½ cup washing soda in wash cycle; ½ cup lemon juice in rinse cycle; hang washing out – sunlight is a natural bleach.

dry cleaning: don't do it – wash woollens with mild soap and cold water.

where can I find out more?

- Hazardless Home Handbook: lists most household products in alphabetical order, problems associated with them, storage, disposal, and natural alternatives; download it free from www.metro-region.org/library_docs/garbage/haz_book.pdf
- The Good Shopping Guide – www.thegoodshoppingguide.co.uk 0845 458 9911; ranks brands using a range of criteria - anything you could possibly want to buy
- The Green Shop – www.greenshop.co.uk - for green cleaning products; they have everything you need
- <http://pages.ivillage.com/cleaningfairy/NaturalFairy.html> - fun green cleaning recipes

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