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## Clean Up Your Act

***Natural spick-and-span options are better than ever, so say goodbye to toxic chemicals in cleaning products***

### Tip

Use a cleaning service? Provide them with environmentally friendly products and show how well they work, if necessary. Or look for an eco-cleaning operation in your area.

**A clean home** is a healthy home, right? Not necessarily. It turns out the very efforts to rid your living space of dirt, dust, mildew and grime might make it a more dangerous environment for you and your family. And you're not the only ones who suffer: Many of the ingredients in household cleaners contaminate the air and water as well as thousands of organisms, from algae to wildlife, when they are washed down drains and make their way into the ecosystem.

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH WHAT'S WRONG ON THE MARKET

"Conventional commercial cleaners are some of the most toxic substances you can bring into your home," says Linda Mason Hunter, home ecology specialist and co-author of *Green Clean: The Environmentally Sound Guide to Cleaning Your Home*. "Many of the chemicals found in cleaners have only been around since World War II, and they've never been tested for long-term health effects."

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has found that the immediate health risks associated with the use of conventional household cleaning products include asthma attacks, headaches, dizziness, visual disorders and memory impairment. Additionally, a 1987 study by the EPA determined that the air inside a typical home is up to ten times more polluted than the air outside the home because of the toxic chemicals many of us use to scrub and sanitize. They include the following:

- **Formaldehyde** a volatile organic compound, found in liquid cleaners and floor polishes, that is suspected of causing cancer.
- **Chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite)** a toxic compound that irritates the respiratory system and emits poisonous vapors when combined with ammonia or vinegar.
- **Petroleum distillates (naphthas)** nonrenewable, oil-based resources found in furniture and floor polishes that can affect the central nervous system and lead to cognitive and behavioral problems.
- **Pesticides and fungicides** such as chlorine and alkyl ammonium chlorides, found in most conventional antibacterial cleaners and mildew removers. They can cause skin irritation and nervous system damage.



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### POLISH OFF OR PITCH OUT?

There are two ways to go about switching over to eco-friendly products: gradually replace your scrubs and sprays as you use them up, or toss toxin-filled items out once and for all. Experts are split on the issue, but Annie Berthold-Bond, author of *Clean & Green: The Complete Guide to Non-Toxic and Environmentally Safe Housekeeping*, cautions that there are a few situations in which she suggests making an immediate change. “If the home contains young children or anyone who is pregnant, sick or sensitive to chemicals, contact your local recycling center about disposing of your toxic cleaning products,” she suggests.

If you choose to deplete your supply of conventional household cleaners before replacing them with safer alternatives, carefully follow the instructions to avoid toxic reactions, always wear gloves when you clean, and make sure your home has lots of ventilation while you’re scrubbing—even an open window or two can help get the fumes out.

### MAKING A LIFELONG CHANGE

Once you start using natural cleaning agents, you’ll find it hard to believe you ever allowed something labeled “Hazardous” into your house. Here are a few of the products we’ve taken a shine to, plus some tried-and-true homemade options you can make with everyday pantry items such as baking soda and vinegar. Store-bought or homemade, they’re all reasonably priced, readily available and really work at keeping things spotlessly clean—without compromising your health or the environment.

### AMAZING ALL-PURPOSE LIQUIDS

#### Earth Friendly Products’ Creamy Cleanser

Who wouldn’t choose lovely scented lemon oil over petroleum-based products for cleaning porcelain and stainless steel surfaces that directly touch dishes (in the kitchen sink) and your delicate skin (in the bathroom)? This grease-cutting cream gives them all sparkle and shine, without scratching. \$3/16 oz. 800.335.3267; ecos.com

### Read Up

These books are great resources and reference guides for eco-conscious housecleaning.

- ***Naturally Clean: The Seventh Generation Guide to Safe & Healthy Non-Toxic Cleaning***, by Jeffrey Hollender. \$11.50; amazon.com
- ***Safer Alternatives for the Home and Garden***. Published by the Washington Toxics Coalition. \$20; watoxics.org.
- ***Baking Soda: Over 500 Fabulous, Fun, and Frugal Uses You’ve Probably Never Thought of***, and ***Vinegar: Over 400 Various, Versatile, & Very Good Uses You’ve Probably Never Thought of***, by Vicki Lansky. \$9 each; practicalparenting.com



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### **Bi-O-Kleen's Spray & Wipe Cleaner**

Grease-cutting, disinfecting grapefruit seed extract and orange oil make this a versatile liquid for everything from countertops and toilets to laundry and upholstery stains. It's even safe enough to use on dolls, teddies and that muddy toy dump truck. \$5/32 oz.

800.477.0188; bi-o-kleen.com

### **Homemade Option: baking sod a and vinegar**

Mix 1 cup each water and vinegar plus 2 Tbs. baking soda in a spray bottle. Use as you would any cleaning liquid.

### **FABULOUS CARPET AND FLOOR SCRUBBERS**

#### **Seventh Generation's Natural Citrus Carpet Cleaner**

The hydrogen peroxide (a powerful bleaching agent) safely replaces the neurotoxin butyl cellosolve and the possible carcinogen perchloroethylene in conventional carpet foams and sprays. The nonaerosol spritz loosens ground-in dirt, dissolves stains and eliminates odors.

Plus, your just-cleaned carpet will be safe enough for little ones to crawl around on. \$5/32 oz.  
800.456.1191; seventhgeneration.com

### **The Good Word**

Look for products that say the following on the label:

- **Biodegradable**
- **Hypoallergenic**
- **Chlorine-free**
- **Nontoxic**
- **Nonhazardous**
- **VOC-free (or low-VOC)**
- **No harmful solvents**
- **No ammonia**
- **Not tested on animals**

### **Homemade Option: shaving cream**

Spray foam shaving cream on carpet stains, let stand 30 minutes, then rub with a sponge and vacuum.

### **Earth Friendly Products' Floor Kleener**

This natural alternative to petroleum-based cleaners is made of coconut and lemon oils that condition and cleanse hardwood and laminate floors without stripping them or leaving chalky streaks. Vinegar in the formula dissolves grease and wax buildup. \$3.79/22 oz.

800.335.3267; ecos.com

### **Homemade Option: vinegar and warm water**

Mop floor with a solution of ½ cup distilled vinegar and 1 gallon warm water.

### **SUPER SCRATCH-FREE SCOURER**

#### **Bon Ami Polishing Cleanser**

Talk about standing the test of time! For over 120 years, Bon Ami has been chlorine-, dye- and fragrance-free. The all-purpose cleansing powder has naturally abrasive minerals that cut grease and add shine without scratching surfaces. \$1.39/14 oz.

800.846.1230; bonami.com



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### Homemade option: baking soda and lemon

Sprinkle baking soda on a used lemon half and use as a scratch-free scrubber on counters, tiles and stainless steel.

### WONDER WINDOW TREATMENT

#### Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day Window Spray (Lemon Verbena Scent)

Renewable, biodegradable plant-based surfactants in this spray provide the same streak-free shine as ammonia-laced blue liquids. What's more, the fragrance acts as an aromatherapy pick-me-up to get you through doing all the windows. \$5/20 oz.

877.865.1508; mrsmeyers.com

### Homemade option: vinegar and newspaper

Mix equal parts white vinegar and water in spray bottle, spritz on glass surfaces and wipe with newsprint for a streak-free shine that won't leave tiny fibers behind.

### DIVINE HAND-WASH FOR DELICATES

#### Forever New Fabric Care Wash

This biodegradable, cruelty-free powder is the preferred cleanser of high-end lingerie dealers. The patented formula contains no phosphates or bleach to keep delicates from bleeding or fading. \$5/8 oz.

800.456.0107. forevernew.com

### Homemade option: hydrogen peroxide and water

To whiten delicate garments without bleach, soak them for 30 minutes in a solution of ½ cup hydrogen peroxide and 4 cups water.

### Magic Formulas

Replace store-bought products with homemade recipes that cost pennies and protect your home environment from bleach and petroleum products.

**Tub and toilet scrub** Sprinkle baking soda over area to be cleaned, then spray with white vinegar and scrub with a sponge.

**Carpet deodorizer** Combine ½ cup baking soda, ½ cup cornstarch and several drops lavender essential oil. Sprinkle on rug, let stand 30 minutes, then vacuum.

**Mildew remover** Mix 1 tsp. tea tree oil (an all-natural antifungal liquid) and 1 cup water in spray bottle and apply to affected area.

**Furniture polish** Mix 1 tsp. lemon juice with ¼ cup olive or vegetable oil. Wipe down wood furniture with mixture.

**Dishwasher detergent** Combine 2 Tbs. borax (a boric acid mineral) and 2 Tbs. baking soda in detergent compartment, then fill rinse drawer with white vinegar. Run dishwashing cycle as usual.