Develop Your Skills:
Green Cleaning

Introduction

House cleaners are constantly in contact with chemicals, some of which can be toxic. Products that are toxic can enter our body, and cause harm, through breathing or coming into contact with skin or eyes or by ingestion, the impact of exposure can range from a rash to skin irritation or severe sickness. Cleaning agents are also harmful to the environment. Green cleaning promotes 'healthy' alternatives to the harsh chemicals you're constantly exposed to. Green alternatives are better for you, for the environment, and making your own cleaning products can dramatically reduce your supplies cost.

Green Cleaning.

Green, or ecological, cleaning is a method that recommends use of cleaning products that do not put you, the people that live within the home you clean, or the environment in danger. Commercial cleaning products often contain irritants, substances that can provoke an asthma attack. Products for Green Cleaning that are recommended here are effective, low cost and safe for you and for the environment. Key concepts and goals of green cleaning include:

- Reducing waste by using less water.
- Using products that are made of materials that are easily recyclable, or are themselves recycled.
- Using less toxic chemicals, thus reducing pollution.
- Reducing toxic chemical usage, thus diminishing a house cleaner's exposure to potentially harmful toxins.

Green cleaning equipment.

Green cleaning equipment can help reduce energy and water usage. Examples of green cleaning equipment:

- Microfiber. Microfiber reduces water usage, reduces the use of paper towels, rags, mops, works better to remove dust, allergens and bacteria.
- HEPA vacuum. HEPA stands for, high-efficiency particulate arrestance. The filters capture almost all the dust in the air, so you don't breath it in. This is beneficial for asthma and allergy sufferers, because the HEPA filter traps fine particles, like pollen and dust mite feces, which trigger symptoms of allergies and asthma.
- Flat mop and bucket. The microfiber of a flat mop needs very little water, eliminating the need to keep pouring out gallons of dirty mop water, and reduces the amount of soap used. The cleaning heads are machine washable, up to 200 washes. These mops are also lighter and reduce strain on your back!

Creating alternatives.

When making recipes remember to always wear the proper protective equipment, like gloves and eyewear. Always label everything you make with the date, ingredients. Keep all chemicals and solutions you make are not easily accessible to children. Keep your heating element/burner away

from the ingredients. Heat in another location and then bring the hot water to a place where your ingredients are. When you begin to make your own products it'll be important to know what each ingredient is bring to the table, what it's contributing to the cleaning process, this will allow you to make modifications based on soils. Also note that hybrid cleaning, cleaning with green and non green cleaning agents, can be dangerous, mixing certain substances can be dangerous, pH, alkali, and acidic levels all play factors in determining which cleaning agents and alternative cleaners can work together. Common alternative cleaner ingredients include:

- Baking soda. Very alkaline in nature with a high pH, it's great for its ability to absorb grease and spills, neutralize odors, and scrub surfaces effectively, but gently without scratching. It also has bactericidal and stain removing abilities.
- Castile soap. Castile soap loosens dirt and breaks down grease.
- Lemon. Lemons smell great and they also cut through grease and grime. The low pH and citric acid content of lemons make them great at combatting germs, the high acidity level helps loosen alkaline mineral deposits, such as calcium, and dissolve soap scum.
- Vinegar. Vinegar has a low pH (2.0) and its acetic acid content make it an effective cleaner for soap scum, alkaline mineral deposits, inhibiting mold, and more. It's also an effective disinfectant that kills viruses and bacteria. **Caution:** Do not mix vinegar with bleach, many people mix the two to attack really stubborn soils. If you do this, it's like chemical warfare on yourself, you probably will create toxic chlorine gas, which can be very harmful. You put yourself at risk of chemical burns, including chemical burns to your lungs and eyes. Hydrogen peroxide and vinegar should also not be put in the same container, they're both recommended ingredients in many alternative cleaners. If they're put in the same container they can create peracetic acid, a high enough concentration of this acid can cause serious irritation to all exposed body areas. While they cannot be in the same container they can be used on the same surface.
- Salt. Salt is beneficial for scrubbing and fighting mold and mildew. When combined with lemons it's an effective rust remover.
- Washing soda. The high alkalinity of washing soda helps it act as a solvent to remove a range of stains.

Alternative cleaners:

- To clean floors. Use ¼ cup liquid castile soap and 2 gallons of warm water. For greasy soils on floors add ¼ distilled white vinegar to bucket of warm water. This is not a good cleaner to use with wood or marble floors.
- Cleaning leather. Use 2 drops of castile soap to 1 quart warm water, apply with light damp cloth.
- Cleaning countertops. Mix together equal parts vinegar and water in a spray bottle. If your countertop is made from marble, granite, or stone, skip the vinegar, the acidity is no good for these surfaces, and use rubbing alcohol or the vodka instead.
- Oven cleaner. Bon Ami or mix 2 tablespoons of liquid soap, 2 teaspoons of borax and 1 quart warm water. Leave on a surface for 20 minutes, then scrub with baking soda

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- Heavy duty cleaner. Use 1 teaspoon of liquid castile soap, 1 teaspoon TSP[1], 1 teaspoon borax, 1 teaspoon vinegar, 1 quart hot water. Wipe on or use non-aerosol spray bottle. This cleaner is good for grease and mildew.
- All-purpose cleaners.
    - Mix liquid soap with 1 tbsp of baking soda; add lemon juice and water.
    - Fill a spray bottle with ½ part vinegar and ½ part water, add some lemon juice for smell.
    - ½ tsp. washing soda, 2 tbsp vinegar, ½ tsp. liquid castile soap, 2 cups very hot water. Add first three ingredients to a spray bottle, then slowly add the hot water and shake until dry ingredients are dissolved.
- Carpet, rug and upholstery cleaner.
    - Mix 1 quart warm water, 1 tsp mild liquid soap, 1tsp Borax, and a little lemon or splash of vinegar. Apply with a damp cloth or sponge and rub gently into the area. Wipe with a clean cloth and allow to dry.
    - Mix ¼ cup of each of salt, borax and vinegar. Rub paste into carpet and leave for a few hours, then vacuum.
- Disinfectant
    - Mix 2 cups of water, 3 tablespoons of liquid soap, and 20-30 drops of tea tree oil.
    - Mix 2 tsp borax, 4 tbsp vinegar and 3 hot cups of water, to add strength add ¼ cup of liquid castile soap. Wipe on with damp cloth or non-aerosol spray bottle.
- Clogs. This recipe will clean minor clogs. Empty a half cup of baking soda down the drain and then a half cup of vinegar. Let it sit for a few minutes. Then empty a pitcher of boiling water down the drain. Repeat the process if necessary. If the blockage persists, use a rubber drain cleaner or “plumber’s friend”, and if it is still clogged, use a “mechanical snake”.
- Copper cleaner: white vinegar, water, salt

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This tip sheet was developed by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), an alliance of nannies, care workers and housecleaners working together for rights and dignity. We invite you to join us! NDWA members get special benefits and access to trainings on topics like this one. Visit www.domesticworkers.org to find out more.

This tip sheet was put together by domestic workers and advocates and is not to be understood as direct medical or legal advice. For legal or medical assistance, please consult a healthcare or legal professional.

[1] T.S.P (Trisodium Phosphate)- Can be especially toxic and should be handled with care.