

A Greener Cleaner

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From the days of indoor plumbing through the Industrial Revolution, cleaning products consisted of simple solutions found around most homes. Baking soda, distilled white vinegar, lemon juice, olive oil, and salt used alone, or in some combination, kept interiors clean and made furniture and hard wood floors gleam. It wasn't until after World War II that chemicals—initially developed for warfare purposes—found their way onto grocers' shelves and into people's homes...



AS A POPULAR ADVERTISING SLOGAN PROCLAIMED, "BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY!" People bought it, and bought the products that promised to make whites whiter than white, floors cleaner than clean, and everything else sparkling and sanitized within an inch of its life.

And if today's cleaning aisles are any indication, we're still buying it. There are literally *thousands* of synthetic chemical compounds within cleaning products packaged and marketed to grab your attention. And, according to a 2003 U.S. Geological Survey Study, low levels of compounds from 95 different types of chemicals were found in rivers downstream from urban areas. Most of us have been exposed at one time or another to these compounds, and it is believed that there is a correlation between chemical exposure and medical issues. Many compounds can cause people to develop respiratory problems, and since 1980, there has been a 160 percent increase in asthma among children under the age of 4. Breast cancer rates in the United States are 30 percent higher than in less industrialized countries. Ironic, especially considering that U.S. health care is considered by many to be the best overall health care in the world. And, while it would be virtually impossible to pin this all on better living through chemistry, it does make one wonder if these products that are cleaning our homes are hurting our bodies.

And here are a few more things to ponder... Did you know that dish washing liquid is the #1 cause of children being poisoned? Most are petroleum-based and those pretty colors and scents are not found in nature. Sweet-seeking children have been known to confuse mothballs with candy, resulting in seizures and calls to the poison hotline. Lye and sodium hydroxide, two ingredients commonly found in both oven and drain cleaners, can cause severe corrosion to skin and mucous membranes, and can even be fatal if swallowed. Scouring cleaners designed to quickly clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces often contain crystalline silica, a known carcinogen. And toilet cleaners? Most contain an irritating blend of chlorine and hydrochloric acid; just breathing the fumes is harmful, never mind what happens to the poor fish who have to swim in these things.

But the good news is that if you don't require your whites whiter than white—if a regular white will do—you can get your home and laundry as clean as clean using products that don't harm the environment and don't alter your body's respiratory or endocrine systems. So, instead of hitting the cleaning product aisle in the super market, go to baking goods/condiments...

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Problem

DULL WOOD FLOORS, SCRATCHED TABLE TOPS AND FURNITURE

STAINLESS STEEL LOST ITS SHINE

DIRTY PORCELAIN

CHROME NEEDS POLISHING

CLOGGED DRAIN

MOLD AND MILDEW ON SURFACES

MOLD AND MILDEW STAINS ON LAUNDRY

RUST STAINS ON SURFACES

STREAKED, DIRTY WINDOWS

DULL BRASS AND COPPER

COFFEE PERCOLATOR DULL, DIRTY

HARD WATER DEPOSITS

PET ODORS IN CARPETS AND UPHOLSTERY

DIRTY CERAMIC TILES

TOILET BOWL RINGS

GRASS STAINS

Solution

1 cup olive oil + juice of one lemon (use soft cloth, rub and polish—keep in a sealed glass jar for re-use, should last 1 month).

Full strength distilled white vinegar on a sponge.

Baking soda on a damp sponge.

1 part club soda and 1 part distilled white vinegar applied w/a sponge.

Boil one cup of water, add 1 cup baking soda and 1 cup vinegar to boiling water (mixture will fizz), and pour down clogged drain. Flush with water. Repeat if necessary until water runs freely.

In a spray bottle, mix 1 drop of tea tree oil with 1 cup of water (or use *Ye Olde Thyme Disinfectant*, recipe right).

Scrub with a paste made with 1 part salt and 1 part lemon juice, let set in sun, wash as usual.

Make paste using 2 parts baking soda, 1 part water, scrub with toothbrush. Rinse well with water.

Mix 1 part vinegar and 1 part water—use as you would glass cleaner.

Mix 1 part lemon juice and 1 part baking soda; make paste and scrub.

Put 4-5 tablespoons of salt where you would ordinarily put coffee, add water, let mixture “brew” as it would if coffee were in it.

Cut a lemon in half and sprinkle baking soda on top; rub over deposits until they disappear.

Mix approximately (exact amounts aren't critical) 4 ounces of hydrogen peroxide, 1/4 cup baking soda, and 1 drop of detergent into 1 quart water. Use immediately (once the hydrogen peroxide and soda become inert, it's no longer effective). Spread over area with odor problem; solution should neutralize smell immediately. Discard unused portion. (You may want to do a test patch first. I would.)

Mix 1 part vinegar and 1 part water and use sponge to clean grungy areas. This solution is safe for most commercial tiles. (Do not use on marble as solution is too acidic for porous surfaces.)

Use undiluted vinegar exactly as you would use a commercial toilet bowl cleaner.

Mix organic enzymes (available at whole food stores) with one tablespoon of water in ceramic or glass bowl, spread paste on the affected area, rubbing it with a toothbrush if seriously soiled. Let sit for an hour, wash as usual. Repeat if necessary.

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I think I'd rather have lemon than crystalline silica in my water...

No Plugs Required

Air fresheners are everywhere—you can spray them or plug them in. Some are time-released, and some provide mini-light shows. They account for millions in sales annually, but at what cost? The chemicals that mimic scents of rose and spring dew, mixed with just the littlest bit of ozone, can create a toxic environment that can cause headaches, depression, and hormonal imbalances in men and women. Forget the plugs and light shows; try one of these simple, non-toxin-producing recipes instead.

SAFE SCENTS

Vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, and mint (fresh, or dried) all safely emit scents. In a small saucepan, boil 2 cups of water with any combination of spices that you like. When the mixture has reached a boil, turn it off. Leave the pan out to scent your home as long as the scent lasts. **Vanilla extract** can also remove unwanted smells; simply place a tablespoon of vanilla in an open container next to any area that needs a smell neutralized.

SWEET SPRAY MIST

Using an eyedropper, combine the following **essential oils** (found in most health food stores, or on-line) in a small glass jar: 20 drops **sweet orange**, 10 drops **lavender**, 10 drops **eucalyptus**. Mix together well and combine 4-8 drops of this mixture with one cup of **purified water** in a spray bottle. Use spray anywhere you like, anytime. Store in a cool place, away from sunlight and it should last for 1-2 months.

YE OLDE THYME DISINFECTANT

According to Days of Yore lore, grave robbers who pilfered plague victim's remains rubbed this on themselves to protect themselves from germs. Hopefully, your household tasks aren't quite as gruesome...

2 QUARTS ORGANIC APPLE CIDER VINEGAR
1 TABLESPOON EACH OF: dried lavender,
rosemary, sage, and mint

Mix together in a 2-quart jar with a screw top lid, close tightly. Let sit for 4 weeks, then strain out herbs. Pour into spray bottle. Use as spray disinfectant on countertops, door knobs, telephone receiver, etc.

WHAT'S pH GOT TO DO WITH IT?

When it comes to cleaning stains and pH balances, think neutral. Acidity is measured by pH, on a scale of 1 to 14. 7 is the Switzerland of pH; anything above 7 is alkaline, anything below, acidic. When you are cleaning something, you are, in effect, neutralizing its pH. Club soda, an alkaline, will remove coffee and wine stains, which are acidic. Acidic vinegar will neutralize water scale, an alkaline stain.