

SUSTAINABLE LIVING GUIDE: 78. HOW TO MAKE GREEN CLEANING RECIPES THAT REALLY WORK¹

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When we think of air pollution, we generally think of places like the LA freeway. But the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found that indoor air pollution is sometimes 30 times worse than outdoor levels. And a lot of that has to do with the harsh cleaning products we use to clean our homes, and the chemicals they contain, which can actually make us sick and pollute the environment.

Researchers are finding that many familiar household cleaners contain compounds that trigger asthma or contain plastics chemicals linked to infertility, eczema, birth defects, and just plain rotten indoor air quality. Cleaning up your cleaning habits is a great way to commemorate Earth Day; it protects the environment from harsh chemicals, but also keeps harsh fumes out of your house, protecting your family's health, too.

And there's one more benefit: Because the ingredients are so much cheaper, making your own green cleaners will save you money.

Try these natural cleaning remedies for a clean house and clean indoor air:

All-Purpose Cleaner

Never waste your money on "antibacterial" cleaners and soaps, whose active ingredients have been linked to thyroid damage, water pollution, and the emergence of drug-resistant superbugs like MRSA. Instead, kill germs with an all-purpose vinegar solution: nine parts water, one part white vinegar.

For particular nasty messes, such as cleaning up a countertop after handling raw meat, squirt straight white vinegar on the surface, and follow with a squirt of hydrogen peroxide to knock out virtually all germs.

Tile Cleaner

A recent Environmental Working Group (EWG) report found the popular cleanser Comet contained 146 air contaminants, including seven chemicals linked to cancer, two chemicals linked to reproductive damage, and two chemicals that interfere with hormones. Three of the chemicals EWG detected—formaldehyde, toluene, and benzene—are components of gasoline. To avoid these, make your own scrubbing paste:

- ½ cup baking soda
- Liquid soap (we like Dr. Bronner's peppermint or detergent)
- 5 to 10 drops of pure essential oil of lavender, tea tree oil, or rosemary (optional)

¹ Rodale News, April 22, 2010

- Place baking soda in a bowl, slowly pour in liquid soap, stirring until it looks like frosting. Add optional essential oils. Scoop onto a sponge, scrub, and rinse. You can also try cutting a lemon in half and using that as a scrubber.

Oven Cleaner

- 2 cups hot water
- 1 Tablespoon natural dish liquid
- 1 teaspoon borax
- Mix the ingredients, spray on a spill, let sit for 20 minutes, and wipe off with a clean cloth.
- For handling an extra-greasy mess, wipe off as much loose goop as possible first with crumpled newspaper, then use the spray.
- Check out our Nickel Pincher's tips to learn how to annihilate older, caked-on spills.

Window Cleaner

- ¼ cup vinegar
- ½ teaspoon natural liquid soap (optional; I use natural dish liquid or Dr. Bronner's)
- 2 cups water
- Put all ingredients in a spray bottle and shake to blend. To use it, spray onto the glass, covering as much as you can finish in a few minutes at a time, scrub as needed with the rough side of a kitchen sponge, and squeegee off. Use a cotton cleaning cloth to dry off the blade of the squeegee between swipes, and to wipe up any liquid that puddles at the bottom edges of the windowpanes. Toss the cleaning cloths in the wash basket, and enjoy your sparkling windows.

Lemon Oil Duster

- 10 drops pure lemon oil
- 2 Tablespoons lemon juice
- A few drops olive oil
- Recycled, clean flannel cotton cloth

Because household dust can be full of harmful substances like flame retardants, allergens, pesticides, and plastics chemicals, it's important to keep your home as clean as possible. However, many dust cleaners contain air contaminants and hormone-disrupting chemicals. Keep it safe by mixing up your own and using it to dust furniture and other surfaces where dust collects in your home.