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Clean green with natural, nontoxic cleaners

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Most make-at-home cleaning products, such as disinfectants, soft scrubbers and glass cleaners can be made in a few minutes with stuff you probably already have.

If you think natural cleaning products can't possibly be strong enough for your home's stubborn stains, ease into them, advocates for healthy homes say.

"You may have to go with a stronger product, then switch," says Lisa Beres of Irvine, Calif., creator of the CD "Green Nest: Creating Healthy Homes."

Your nose, too, may need to adjust. You can wean yourself from strong antiseptic odors by incorporating essential oils, such as lavender, into your cleaners. Bonus: "You get a little aromatherapy at the same time," says Annie Berthold-Bond of Rhinebeck, N.Y., author of "Clean & Green" and "Better Basics for the Home."

And if you just don't have a do-it-yourself bone in your body, you can buy nontoxic, ready-mixed products. You can get them at health products stores, of course, but you'll also find them at places you might not expect.

"Natural products are increasingly available in supermarkets," she says.

Recipes for making homemade cleaners

Soft scrubber - Add enough dishwashing liquid (dye-free, fragrance-free if possible) to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup baking soda to make a paste the consistency of frosting.

Fabric softener - Pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar or borax into the final rinse cycle. Caution: Do not use vinegar if you use bleach.

Glass cleaner - Add 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar; or use plain club soda by itself; or add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dishwashing liquid and 3 tablespoons white vinegar to 2 cups water in a spray bottle.

Toilet cleaner - Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar or lemon juice to 1 cup borax.

Oven cleaner - Sprinkle water on the bottom of your oven, then cover with a layer of baking soda. Sprinkle water on top of the baking soda, then let sit overnight. Wipe the oven, then scrub any remaining grime with a dab of liquid detergent on a sponge.

All-purpose spray cleaner - Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon washing soda, a dab of liquid soap and 2 cups hot water in a spray bottle, then shake.

Furniture polish - Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon oil, such as olive or jojoba, with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar or lemon juice in a glass jar. Dab a rag into the solution and wipe wood surfaces.

Mold killer - Add 2 teaspoons tea tree oil to 2 cups water in a spray bottle, then shake.

Air fresheners - For unpleasant kitchen odors, boil cinnamon and cloves in a pan of water; boil cut-up lemons in water; or open windows and doors, then scatter partially-filled dishes of vinegar around the room. Sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ cup borax on the bottom of garbage or diaper pails to inhibit odor-causing mold and bacteria.

Disinfectants - Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup borax with 1 gallon of hot water; or add 1 teaspoon of essential oil, such as lavender, clove or tea tree, to 2 cups of water in a spray bottle; or add 20 drops of grapefruit seed extract to 1 quart water.

Drain cleaner - To open clogs, pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup baking soda down drain, then pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white vinegar and cover the drain. Caution: Do not use this method after trying a commercial drain opener.

Floor cleaners and polishers - Add a few drops of white vinegar to cleaning water. For vinyl or linoleum, add a capful of baby oil to the cleaning water. For wood floors, apply a thin coat of oil and vinegar, in equal amounts, and rub well. For painted wood floors, mix 1 teaspoon washing soda into 1 gallon hot water. For brick and stone tiles, add 1 cup white vinegar to one gallon water and rinse with clear water.

Sources: Annie Berthold-Bond, Lisa Beres, www.epa.gov, www.ecomall.com

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