



# natural cleaning



## what is it?

It's about using cleaning products that don't contain the toxic, synthetic chemicals found in many commercial brands. You can buy 'green' alternatives, or better still, make them yourself. Big manufacturers are constantly bringing out new 'improved' products, which are basically petroleum-based detergents whose ingredients are often toxic, non-renewable, and take a long time to biodegrade.

You don't need such a range of products; you can make your own natural cleaners from just a few basic ingredients:

**Baking soda (or sodium bicarbonate / bicarbonate of soda):** dissolves dirt and grease in water; abrasive, so good for surfaces; neutralises acids and removes odours too.

**White (distilled) vinegar and lemon juice:** nature's acidic grease cutters.

**Hydrogen peroxide:** (3% conc. from chemists) a natural disinfectant produced by the human body and by the action of sunlight on water.

**Borax:** mineral (sodium, boron, oxygen and water), formed when salt lakes evaporate; very low toxicity, yet an effective fungicide and antibacterial cleaning and bleaching agent.

**Cream of tartar:** a natural leftover when grape juice is fermented into wine.

**Washing soda:** can only just be called non-toxic because of its high pH; use for very very stubborn stains (eg engine oil).



*Natural cleaning products are easy to make; there are plenty of recipes in books and online.*

## what are the benefits?

Making your own means you can add water, avoiding the transport of the water in commercial products; re-use containers, reducing the need to manufacture so much plastic; and save lots of money. But the main benefit is that natural cleaners don't cause the health and environmental problems associated with synthetic chemicals when they end up in our bodies or down the drain. Over 70,000 synthetic chemicals are manufactured, and only around 600 have been adequately tested (US Office of Environmental Affairs). Humans haven't evolved to cope with exposure to so many chemicals; asthma and cancers are widespread, and sperm counts are falling. Commercial cleaners produce toxic by-products in their manufacture, as well as in use. Here's a selection of chemicals in commercial products, with the problems they cause:

**Phosphates** (washing-up liquid, washing powders): too much for sewage systems, leads to algal blooms in rivers.

**Paradichlorobenzene** (toilet blocks, deodorisers): possible carcinogen.

**Chlorine** (bleaches): irritant, corrosive; can produce toxic gases when mixed with other cleaning fluids.

**Petrochemicals** (furniture polish, high-strength cleaners): eye, skin and respiratory irritant; can contain the carcinogen benzene.

**Sodium hypochlorite** (bleaches): corrosive; kills bacteria in sewage plants; eye, skin, respiratory irritant.

**Artificial musks** (air fresheners): liver toxin.

**Formaldehyde:** suspected carcinogen.

**Perchloroethylene** (dry cleaning): toxic air pollutant; probable carcinogen; a tiny amount will contaminate groundwater for many years.



*Natural cleaners: clockwise from left – hydrogen peroxide (3%); borax; baking soda; cream of tartar; white vinegar; lemon juice; salt.*



### what can I do?

When buying products, avoid anything with chlorine, ethylene/ethyl, butyl/alkyl, benzene, phenol and formaldehyde. Many towns now have shops where you can refill bottles with cleaning products. Be aware that many commercial providers look like family businesses when in fact they're subsidiaries of giant corporations responsible for extracting wealth from communities and concentrating it in ways that damage democracy. However, it's easy and cheap to make your own cleaning products. For example:

**All-purpose cleaner:** soap and water; or two tablespoons of baking soda in a litre of water.

**Stain remover (surfaces):** sprinkle with salt and lemon juice, leave for a while (a few hours for really bad stains) and wipe clean.

**Stubborn stains:** as a paste, baking soda and a little water removes stubborn stains from coffee cups, doors, appliances etc.

**Carpet freshener:** sprinkle baking soda before vacuuming.

**Eliminating odours:** litter trays, old shoes – baking soda; fridge – baking soda / water paste.

**Removing grease:** vinegar (white) with salt.

**Disinfectant** (chopping boards, bathrooms and toilets): spray with white vinegar, then spray with hydrogen peroxide solution; wipe clean.

**Oven cleaner:** make a paste with equal parts salt, baking soda and water, paste onto oven walls, leave (overnight is good), then wipe off.

**Metal polish:** vinegar or lemon juice (don't use baking soda on aluminium as it will attack it).

**Furniture polish:** ½ cup lemon juice with a teaspoon of olive oil, apply with a soft rag.

**Window cleaner:** 1 litre water, ¼ cup vinegar, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, shake, keep in spray bottle and use like ordinary window cleaner.

**Drain cleaner:** put ½ cup baking soda down drain, then ½ cup vinegar, leave for 15 minutes, then pour down a kettle of boiling water.

**Washing dishes:** make a paste with sodium bicarbonate and water; or buy green washing-up liquid (see links) – phosphate free.

**Mould remover:** spray with equal parts vinegar and water, leave for 5 minutes and wipe clean.



*Air fresheners: pot pourri; baking soda; cut lemon; cinnamon and cloves (simmer for kitchen odours).*

**Air freshener:** open the window; cut lemons or baking soda in a dish; in the kitchen, simmer cinnamon and cloves.

**Toilet cleaner:** spray with vinegar and water mix around rim, pour cup of vinegar and couple of spoons baking soda into bowl, leave for 15 mins, brush and flush.

**Rust remover:** scour with cream of tartar.

**Laundry liquid:** mix sodium bicarbonate with water; or buy green products (see links).

**Stain remover (clothes):** equal parts vinegar and water; for grease, mix borax and water, rub in and wipe off.

**Laundry bleach:** don't use chlorine-based bleaches; ½ cup washing soda in wash cycle; ½ cup lemon juice in rinse cycle; hang washing out – sunlight is a natural bleach.

**Dry cleaning:** don't do it – wash woollens with mild soap and cold water.

You can use apple cider vinegar, which is gentler than white vinegar; and you can make your own. You can make your own natural soaps & essential oils too.

### resources

- see [lowimpact.org/natural-cleaning](http://lowimpact.org/natural-cleaning) for more information, recipes, links & books, including:
- Jen Chillingsworth, *Clean Green*
- Fern Green, *Natural Home Cleaning*
- M. Briggs, *Natural Green Cleaning Book*
- [bit.ly/2BER6tg](http://bit.ly/2BER6tg) – 10 of the most toxic cleaners
- [bit.ly/2ZuoMx2](http://bit.ly/2ZuoMx2) – what you can and can't clean with vinegar

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