

Toxic Truth

What are some alternatives to household hazardous products?

Making your own household cleaning products is not only cheaper, it is safer for you and the environment. Why keep a cupboard full of products which are often unnecessary, expensive, and over-packaged? Instead, stock up on pure soap, washing soda, baking soda, vinegar, and cornstarch. These ingredients, along with other items commonly found in the kitchen, are all you need to have a clean and healthier home. Borax and ammonia are also effective cleaners but it is recommended to use them only when there is no milder, safer alternative. Beware -- both cleaners can be eye and skin irritants and ammonia can be dangerous if mixed with other cleaning products.

Furniture and floor polish

Polish unvarnished wood with olive, peanut or almond oil, or dissolve 1 tbsp. of lemon oil in 1 pint of mineral oil.

All-purpose cleaner

Mix 1/2 cup (125 ml) of pure soap and 1 gallon (4 litres) of hot water. To help cut grease add 1/4 cup of lemon juice.

Bleach

Use borax in place of bleach.

Laundry

Add 1/3 cup of washing soda as water is filling machine. Add clothes. Then add 1 1/2 cups of soap. When making the initial switch from detergent to soap laundry cleaner, wash laundry with washing soda only. This will eliminate detergent residues that might react with the soap and cause materials to yellow.



Dishes

Use dissolved soap flakes in hot water and for tough grease add some vinegar.



Stains

Ink: Soak in milk, use hydrogen peroxide, or you can use cold water combined with one tablespoon of cream of tartar and one tablespoon of lemon juice.



Wine: Immediately pour salt or cold soda water on the stain and soak in milk before washing.

Grease: Use borax on a damp cloth.

Chewing gum: Rub with ice and the gum will flake off.

Coffee cup stains: Use moist salt.

Fabric Softener

Add 1/4 cup of vinegar to the rinse cycle.

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Toxic Truth *continued*

Carpet cleaner



To clean and deodorize carpets: vacuum, liberally sprinkle carpet with baking soda, then vacuum again. For tough stains, try cold soda water or repeatedly blot with vinegar and soapy water.

Drain cleaner

To clean your drains, pour 1/2 cup of baking soda down the drain followed by 1/2 cup of vinegar. Let stand for 15 minutes and flush with boiling water.

Paints

Use latex or water-based paints.

Fertilizer

Replace chemical fertilizers with peat moss, manure, fishmeal or organic compost. Lawn fertilizer is unnecessary if you water your lawn properly and practice grass cycling. To grass cycle you simply need to leave the grass clippings on the lawn so that the nutrients from them can be reabsorbed into the soil. Do not cut the grass too short so that deeper root systems can be developed and so that the lawn will hold more water. When necessary, thoroughly water your lawn in the early morning for no more than three hours with a regular sprinkler. It is also important to aerate your lawn every couple of years.

Pesticides

Many commercial pesticides are not only unnecessary, but are unhealthy for you, your pets, and the environment. It is best to determine why you have pests and take steps to prevent infestation, such as sealing cracks, keeping all food covered, and keeping your kitchen clean, free of crumbs and other food particles.

Ants: Squeeze lemon juice at place of entry and leave the peel. You can also deter ants with lines of chalk, bone meal, charcoal dust and cayenne pepper.

Cockroaches: Plug cracks along baseboards, cupboards, and around pipes, sinks, and bathtub fixtures. For a trap, lightly grease the inner neck of a milk bottle and put stale beer or a raw potato in it.

Fruit flies: Pour a small amount of beer or wine into a wide-mouth jar. Put a plastic bag across the mouth of the jar with a rubber band. Poke a small hole in the bag. Fruit flies will enter through the hole and not be able to find their way out again. Prevent fruit flies by keeping food wrapped.

Silverfish: Make silverfish traps by combining one part molasses with two parts vinegar and place near cracks.

Plant pests: You can mix 5 grams of dry pure soap in 1 litre of water and spray it on pests and plant leaves. Another option is to blend two to three very hot peppers, 1/2 an onion, and a clove of garlic in 4 litres of water. Boil this mixture and steep it for two days. Then strain the mixture and use it as a spray for indoor and outdoor plants.

Bug repellent: Use citronella spray or burn citronella candles. Citronella is available at most drug stores.

Fleas on pets: Give your pet garlic or brewers yeast. Most flea collars, sprays and powders contain chemicals which are unhealthy for your pets (as well as for children who may be playing with them).



Polishes

Metal polishes are expensive and often contain toxic chemicals. It is not necessary to use commercial products to polish metal because the alternatives are easy to use, safe, and work great.

Chrome: Use apple cider vinegar to polish chrome or try white flour on a dry rag.

Brass: Use Worcestershire sauce or try equal parts salt and flour, with a little vinegar on a dry rag.

Copper: Use lemon juice and a little salt or hot vinegar and a little salt on a dry rag.

Silver: In a non-metal bowl mix 1 litre of water, 1 tbsp. salt, 1 tbsp. baking soda and a strip of aluminum foil.

Stainless steel: Polish stainless steel with olive oil.