



Cleaners in the Home

Nontoxic Alternatives for Improved Environmental Quality Health Education Facts

Household cleaning chemicals contribute significantly to pollution problems. We can all help improve the quality of our water and air by using readily available nontoxic alternatives.

Basic ingredients

Five basic ingredients serve as the building blocks for many safe home cleaning needs.

Baking soda - cleans and deodorizes. Softens water to increase sudsing and cleaning power of soap. Good scouring powder.

Borax - cleans and deodorizes. Excellent disinfectant. Softens water. Available in laundry section of grocery store.

Soap - biodegrades safely and completely and is nontoxic. Available in grocery stores and health food stores. Sold as liquid, flakes, powder or in bars. Bars can be grated to dissolve more easily in hot water. Insist on soap without synthetic scents, color or other additives. Synthetic detergents cause more poisonings than any other household product. Even phosphate-free, biodegradable laundry detergent contributes to water pollution.

Washing soda - cuts grease and removes stains. Disinfects, softens water. Available in laundry section of grocery store or in pure form from chemical supply houses as "sodium carbonate."

White vinegar - cuts grease and freshens.

General cleaners

Use the simplest, mildest formula to get the job done. First try warm water mixed with soap (or vinegar if the surface will show spots), adding borax, washing soda, or baking soda if needed.

Use ammonia only when other cleaners won't do the trick. Always provide good ventilation. Never mix ammonia with bleach or commercial cleansers; deadly fumes may form.

All purpose cleaner - mix 2 teaspoons borax and 1 tsp. soap in 1 quart water for a cleaner you can store in a spray bottle.

Disinfectant - for hospital-quality disinfectant, use 1/4 cup borax dissolved in 1/2 gallon hot water. Keeping surfaces clean and dry reduces the need for disinfectant.

Scouring powder - if available, buy a powder without chlorine, colors, detergents, or talc; or scrub with a sponge or firm-bristle brush, soap and either: borax, baking soda or table salt.

Be sure to regularly clean or launder sponges, dish towels, and dish rags to prevent the spread of bacteria.

Air freshener - commercial fresheners work by masking smells, coating nasal passages, and deadening nerves to diminish sense of smell. Instead:

- find sources of odors and eliminate them;
- keep house and closets clean and well-ventilated;
- grow lots of houseplants;
- to absorb odors, place 2 to 4 tablespoons baking soda or vinegar in small bowls in the refrigerator and around the house, and pour 1/2 cup baking soda in the bottom of trash cans;
- for natural fragrance, boil sweet herbs and spices.