

Green Cleaning: Toss the Toxins

The Green Notebook

Have you ever wandered down the household cleaning aisle at the grocery store and noticed the strong odors? This is an example of out gassing—a process that doesn't just happen in the grocery store, but under your sink and in your laundry room.

Are you chemically dependent when it comes to cleaning your home? Well, maybe it's time to kick the habit. Green cleaning is all about getting back to the basics and letting go of our need for designer-label cleaners of convenience.

I could bore you with lots of statistics about how harmful many of these cleaners are, but suffice it to say that most of the products made by the \$18 billion household cleaning industry that feeds our need for squeaky clean simple aren't necessary. Let's consider the alternatives, which are better for you and the environment—a double score.

The "Green Guide" found on grist.org offers the following suggestions to make your home clean and safe, not clean and toxic:

- use laundry soaps labeled "fragrance free"
- use ¼ c. baking soda in the wash cycle to soften clothes or ¼ c. white vinegar
- use white vinegar to help kill bacteria, mold and viruses and the old reliable of hot, soapy water to kill food-borne pathogens (on cutting boards, counters, knives, etc..)
- use a spray bottle filled with water and either ¼ c. white vinegar or one Tbl lemon juice to clean windows or glass
- use a paste of water & baking soda to clean the oven and let stand overnight, then scrub while wearing gloves
- toilets are happy with simple non-chlorine scouring powders (like Bon Ami)
- polish furniture with a mixture of 1 tsp olive oil and ¼ c. white vinegar or look for solvent-free products that use mineral or plant oils
- polish silver with toothpaste and copper with a cloth dipped in white vinegar or lemon juice with a little salt dissolved in it (rinse with water when done)
- use an open box of baking soda as an air freshener (and open your window as often as possible—it allows fresh air in and toxins out)
- Avoid all aerosol sprays in ANY product as they disperse ingredients through the air and make them easy to inhale.

There is a plethora of other natural ways to clean just about everything—look online and at the library or bookstore.

There are also many more alternatives for eco-friendly cleaners you can purchase on-line or in some stores if you would still like the convenience of pre-packaged cleaners: look for companies like Seventh Generation, Ecover, Naturally Yours, Shaklee and Aubrey Organics, to name a few.

So are you ready to toss the toxins? Don't just toss this chemical soup into your garbage or down the drain. Instead, save them for the next Hazardous Waste Drop-off Days for our area which are Sept. 22 at the Knox County Fairgrounds in Mt. Vernon or Oct. 6 at the Whirlpool Corporation in Marion. Both days are from 9-1 p.m. (Call 203-1810 for more info).

Oh, and also of note when doing this research, I found a few more tips worthy of your attention:

- The FDA has found that antibacterial soaps clean just as well as regular soaps (just wash your hands and scrub for a little longer)---they now recommend avoiding these soaps which are helping promote growth resistant bacteria (super germs).
- Avoid using chlorine bleach which is highly caustic (read dangerous—you knew that, right?)
- Skip the spray air fresheners—it's just not worth the risk as they have been linked in some studies to increases in ailments like headaches and depression in adults and diarrhea and ear infections in infants.

Stay tuned next week for a list of other green cleaning resources and further ideas.