



**Why** return to basic cleaning products used years ago? Here are several reasons that you might consider.

- **Simplicity.** Look at the number of cans and bottles of cleaning products around your home. Could you get by with less?
- **Economics.** Could you save money by buying fewer products?
- **Environment.** Would some safe, basic ingredients do the job?

Consider your own standards for cleaning. Other than basic sanitary practices we must follow to maintain good health, nothing is set in stone. There are many possibilities on the continuum from perfection to chaos. Are your standards reasonable given your family's lifestyle, values, and resources such as time, energy, and money? Think about what's truly important to you and your family. Choose and use, or refuses products accordingly.

To choose the best product for the job, you must know the most common ingredients of each product and compare their performance and safety. The common ingredients are abrasives, acids, alkalies, and bleaches.

### λ **Abrasives**

**Abrasives** wear off dirt by rubbing. They scour off hardened food particles, grease, tarnish, and stains. They are found in cleansers. Sandpaper, plastic and nylon meshes, and steel wool are also abrasives. Some metal cleaners contain a fine abrasive like silica. Whiting and rottenstone can be found at hardware stores.

*Caution:* Coarse abrasives feel rough and gritty. Regular use of harsh abrasives scratches shiny finishes of sinks, bathtubs, and kitchen appliances. When surfaces are dull and rough, they soil faster and stain deeper.

### λ **Acids**

Some acids remove hard water deposits. Some remove rust stains. Others take away discoloration from aluminum, brass, bronze, and copper. Very mild acid: Vinegar removes hard water deposits from glassware, rust stains from sinks, and tarnish from brass and copper. It also counteracts alkaline oven cleaners. Lemon juice has much the same use as vinegar. Cream of tartar sweetens coffee makers and brightens aluminum.

## λ **Alkalies**

Alkalies remove oily dirt without rubbing and vary in strength. Very mild alkali: Baking soda mixed with water cleans glass, wall tile, and porcelain enamels. This solution also removes coffee and tea stains from china and plastic dishes. Moderate alkalies: Household ammonia containing 5 to 10 percent ammonia gas in water cleans kitchen range burners and ovens, windows, and mirrors. Sudsy ammonia has soap or detergent added. Borax is a cleaner for woodwork, walls, and sinks.

**Note:** Borax, like ammonia, is toxic when ingested.

## λ **Bleaches**

**Bleaches** remove stains and whiten fabrics. The chemical sodium hypochlorite may be among the list of label ingredients for a chlorine bleach. Chlorine bleach disinfects. It will set rust stains. Oxygen (or non-chlorine) bleaches release active oxygen as the bleaching agent. Oxygen bleaches can be used on many colorfast fabrics. Sodium perborate and hydrogen peroxide are two kinds of oxygen bleach.

*Caution:* Never use chlorine bleach with ammonia, toilet bowl cleaners, dishwashing detergent or rust remover because a poisonous gas may be produced.

## **Handling Cleaning Products Safely**

**Most** cleaning products used in homes today are dangerous only when misused. Store mixtures in labeled containers with recipe attached. The most frequent misuse is accidental swallowing by curious children. Never transfer cleaners into soft drink bottles or other containers that may seem harmless to children. The poorest place to store household cleaners is under the kitchen sink.

If it is necessary to take a child or adult to the hospital or a physician's office because of an accident, be sure you take the container of the product that caused the injury with you. The information on the label will help the physician give prompt and proper treatment. If it's a homemade mixture, take the recipe.

## **General Rules for Managing Toxic Household Products**

- Select the least toxic products for your home.
- Buy only as much as you will use.
- Read the label. It will list ingredients; instructions for use, storage, and disposal; and hazards associated with use.
- Dispose of toxic waste as recommended. Call your county health department for specific information about hazardous household waste collection days and other disposal options.

## Preventive Measures

Regular home maintenance will reduce the amount of cleaning products and potentially hazardous household products needed in the home. For example, roaches and other insects are discouraged by good housekeeping practices. Try these cleaning tips:

- Store food in sealed containers.
- Wipe up spills.
- Use a flea comb (outdoors) or bathe pets frequently to control fleas. Vacuum carpets frequently and discard the vacuum bag each time if fleas or other insects have been a problem. Restrict pets from areas that are difficult to clean to prevent the spread of fleas in the home.
- Avoid baked-on stains in the oven by wiping up after each use.
- Air out the house occasionally to avoid using chemical air fresheners.
- Mildew spores are present in air at all times, ready to grow with adequate moisture and temperature. Keep down moisture levels in the bathroom by ventilating with an exhaust fan or using a small fan to move air with a window opened slightly. Use a squeegee on shower walls. Wipe down the shower curtain or spread it out to dry.
- Purchase metal or plastic screens for drains to prevent hair or food clogs in the pipes. Put fat and grease in a container instead of down the drain.
- Pour a kettle of boiling water into each drain once a week or so, or mix 1/2 cup washing soda with a gallon of warm water. Follow with boiling water.

The following recipes\* for cleaners have been collected over time. They include cleaners that do an adequate job with an average amount of effort. All combine generic ingredients, many of which you may have on hand in your home.

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### λ Sink/Tub Cleaners

**Baking soda** and a sponge will remove regular soap scum and soil.

*To whiten:* Fill sink or tub with lukewarm water. Add some chlorine bleach, and let stand for a while. Chlorine bleach does not remove rust stains.

*To remove iron/rust stains:* Rub with a lemon or lemon juice, or white vinegar.

*For a very stained or discolored sink or tub:* Mix cream of tartar and hydrogen peroxide to a paste and scrub vigorously using a small, stiff brush.

*To remove copper stains (green):* Use soap suds containing ammonia, or salt and vinegar, or salt and the juice of a lemon.

*To remove lime deposits:* Use lemon juice or vinegar.

### λ **Window and Mirror Cleaners**

Try one of the following solutions:

- 4 tablespoons ammonia to 1 quart warm water (for heavy, greasy soil)
- 2 tablespoons vinegar to 1 quart warm water (for hard water spots)

### λ **Hand Cleaner**

**Rub** hands together with baby oil, salad oil, or mineral oil. Wash with soap and water. Safely removes oil paint or wood stain from skin.

### λ **Remove Drain Clogs**

**Try** these methods:

- Open the drain pipe at the trap with a wrench. (The trap is the U-shaped section of the pipe which holds a small amount of water). Remove clogs of hair, grease, or food. This is much cheaper and safer than using commercial products.
- Rent, purchase, or borrow a plumber's snake to remove clogs located beyond the trap.

### λ **Drain Cleaners**

1 cup baking soda

1 cup salt

1/4 cup cream of tartar.

**Mix** the three ingredients. Pour 1/4 cup of mixture into the drain. Follow with 1 cup boiling water. Let it stand, then flush with water. Store extra mixture in a covered container.

1/2 cup baking soda

1/2 cup vinegar

1/2 cup boiling water

**Mix** ingredients. Pour into drain, and let stand. Then flush with water.

### λ **Floor Wax Remover**

3/4 cup dry detergent

1 gallon hot water

1/3 cup ammonia

**Spread** on small area and let stand a few minutes, then scrub to remove old wax. Rinse floor several times. Let floor dry completely before re-waxing. Provide plenty of cross ventilation.

### λ **Brass or Copper Cleaner**

Wash article first. Sprinkle salt on surface, pour on some vinegar, and rub lightly with large soft cloth. Or make a paste of equal parts salt, vinegar, and flour, and rub until clean. Wash in hot, sudsy water and dry or it will retarnish rapidly.

### λ **Furniture Polish**

Combine equal parts of fresh lemon juice and olive oil. Apply with clean cloth and rub briskly.

### λ **Dustless Cloth**

To gather rather than scatter dust, spread several drops of lemon oil on the inside of a glass jar with a screw-top lid. Put cloth (soft rag will do) in jar and close tightly. Dust cloth can be stored in jar between uses or washings.

### λ **Steam Iron Cleaner**

1/3 cup vinegar  
1 teaspoon baking soda

Combine ingredients. (Mixture fizzes.) Pour into iron, set for "steam" with the steam button on. The process works best when the iron is down, resting on the soleplate. Put it on a cooling rack to prevent fires. After about 30 minutes, or when the water is nearly gone, empty residue, and fill iron with clean water. When first using, watch for some dirt to spit out!

**Note:** *Check with the iron manufacturer before using this solution to clean your iron. White vinegar is corrosive to metal and the use of it may void the warranty.*

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Adapted from "Creative Cleaning" by Louise Freeman, Extension Specialist, F.C.Y.; University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension; "Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products" edited by Marguerite Schroeder, Extension Housing Specialist, Washington State University Cooperative Extension; "Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects" by Marie S. Hammer, Extension Home Environment Specialist, University of Florida, Gainesville; and "Consumer Alternatives to Hazardous Household Products," Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County.

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