

Clean Your House without Chemicals

*The Beauty of a Clean, Green,
and Chemical-Free Home*



Everyone loves the look and smell of a clean home – there’s an incredible feeling that comes from knowing everything is in its place, the dust and grime is gone, and there aren’t germs lurking on every surface that’s been proven to be good for our inner psyche.

While we all want a clean home, we also want to keep our living environments, planet, and bodies free of damaging toxins. This can be challenging (but not impossible!) when you consider the thousands of hard-to-pronounce chemicals you find in the products of most retailers’ cleaning aisles. A single product can include dozens of ingredients you can’t pronounce – and many include labels that actually feature warnings about their potential toxicity that are often overlooked. Many of us ignore what’s right there on the label because we trust that they wouldn’t be on the market if they weren’t safe. Plus, many of our own mothers used some of these products when we were growing up, and we’re fine – right?

But if you think about it, we have a lot more information today than we did 50 years ago. We’ve learned about the dangers of smoking and high-fat diets, and now we’re becoming more aware of the cumulative effects of toxins on our body. Fortunately, this awareness has led to a surge in the availability of natural and organic products, and there are now many options for cleaning supplies that are free of the harsh chemicals proven to be the most dangerous.

Toxic Ingredients – The Risks are Real

The list of health concerns that have been tied to toxic ingredients in cleaning supplies is long (and growing), particularly as new research continues to emerge. According to the American Lung Association, many cleaning supplies or household products can irritate the eyes or throat, or cause headaches and other long-term, more serious health problems, including cancer. In fact, a 2018 study published in the *American Thoracic Society’s American Journal of Respiratory & Critical Care Medicine* reported that women who use cleaning chemicals are found to be at greater risk for lung problems and lung function decline.

So, how can you keep your home clean *and* safe? It’s definitely possible! You just need to do a little homework and put some thoughtful effort into choosing and using the right products. First, read your labels closely and don’t be fooled by marketing terms such as “green,” “natural,” “pure,” or “non-toxic,” which often have no science or validity behind them. To be sure the product is safe, carefully read the ingredient list. Many of the top ingredients you want to avoid are outlined below.

»» The Worst Offenders: Top Cleaning Product Ingredients to Avoid

Quaternary Ammonium Compounds

– Commonly known as quats, these harmful ingredients are found in

fabric softeners, disinfectant sprays, toilet cleaners, and many products labeled as “antibacterial.” They have been linked to skin and respiratory problems such as asthma. In addition, due to their antimicrobial nature, quats can help breed drug-resistant bacteria, which is a serious public health concern. Your best bet is to quit the quats altogether.

Phthalates – Most commonly found in fragranced cleaning supplies such as dish soap, air fresheners, and other household products, phthalates have been proven to have a negative impact on the reproductive system of laboratory animals. The FDA has received numerous inquiries as to safety of phthalates due to these reports and their widespread usage in thousands of products. The FDA claims to have been studying them since the early 2000s but has issued no conclusive findings. However, many hormone/endocrinology experts urge consumers to avoid them due to the potential dangers. One of the easiest ways to avoid phthalates is to avoid anything that is artificially scented.

Perchloroethylene (Tetrachlorethylene)

– Sometimes referred to as “perc,” perchloroethylene is a solvent that has been in use commercially since the early 1900s. It is used in dry cleaning solutions, as well as fabric and upholstery cleaning products. According to the American Cancer Society, it has been suspected of causing certain

cancers, based on both human and animal evidence. If your wardrobe requires dry cleaning, be sure to find a “green” dry cleaning company that doesn’t use these harmful products.

Ammonia – Ammonia can be found in many glass and marble cleaners. When used by itself, ammonia can irritate the skin, eyes, throat, and lungs. In fact, the American Lung Association references ammonia as a harmful ingredient. Even worse, if ammonia is combined with bleach or any cleaner containing bleach, it can create gases that can lead to chronic breathing problems or even death. While it’s been in use for decades, there are better alternatives to ammonia (think vinegar or alcohol!) that won’t cause these harmful side effects.

Butoxyethanol – This harmful ingredient is found in many kitchen, window, and multi-purpose cleaners. It’s a solvent that can help with heavy-duty cleaning jobs since it’s powerful enough to dissolve hard-to-scrub dirt and grease. According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, serious health effects have been reported in animals that breathed in or swallowed large amounts of butoxyethanol, so we think it’s best to steer clear of them altogether!

Chlorine – Chlorine is commonly found in toilet bowl cleaners, mildew removers, laundry whitening products, scouring powders, or any product that includes bleach. Chlorine has been linked to many thyroid problems and

is also a skin and respiratory irritant. Most of us know chlorine bleach is toxic, and we also know how our eyes and skin feel after being in a chlorinated pool, so finding alternatives to chlorine when choosing our cleaning supplies is a no-brainer.

Sodium Hydroxide – Sodium hydroxide is often masked as “lye” on ingredient lists, but either way, don’t doubt its potential impact. This ingredient is found in many oven cleaners and products used to treat clogged drains. It’s incredibly corrosive and can cause severe skin burns, sore throat, and other health problems. When you need deep cleaning, baking soda and some serious elbow grease provide a safer alternative.

Keep It Clean & Green

The good news is there are more options for natural, truly green cleaning products and supplies being introduced every day as consumers demand better options. If you’re embarking on a natural cleaning makeover, there are some key supplies you’ll need to be successful. When people ask me for my “must-have” products and supplies, I typically start with this list.

Shopping List for a Natural Cleaning Makeover

- Microfiber Cloths
- Liquid Castile Soap
- Several Glass Spray Bottles
- Baking Soda

- Vodka
- Vinegar (white or apple cider)
- Essential Oils, Citrus Fruits, and/or Fresh Herbs for Scent

Purchasing Safe Cleaning Products

If you’re not the DIY type, or don’t have the time or notion to make your own, that’s ok, too. There are plenty of products available that use only safe, natural ingredients. You can opt for a commercial brand such as Seventh Generation, or you may want to search locally to see if there are any all-natural vendors in your area. A few great places to search include local farmers markets or web sites such as Etsy.com, both of which also allow you to support small business owners who may share your similar interest in a more natural way of life. Happy, healthy cleaning!

Sources

[Cleaning Supplies and Household Chemicals](#)
(American Lung Association)

[Quaternary Ammonium Compounds in Cleaning Products: Health & Safety Information for Health Professionals](#) (Selikoff Centers for Occupational Health)

[Phthalates](#) (U.S. Food & Drug Administration)

[Tetrachlorethylene \(Perchloroethylene\)](#)
(American Cancer Society)

[Public Health Statement: 2-Butoxyethanol and 2-Butoxyethanol Acetate](#)
(Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry)

A Few Basic DIY Recipes



Foaming Hand Soap

- Purified or distilled water
- Essential oils
- Liquid castile soap

Find a foaming soap dispenser of your choice – you can either buy an empty one online or reuse one found at a local retailer. From there, simply fill the bottle one-fifth of the way full with liquid castile soap. Add a few drops of essential oils to create your favorite scent and then fill the rest of the container with purified water. Place the lid on and shake until foamy. These also make great gifts!



All Purpose Cleaner

- 1 cup water
- 10-20 drops of essential oil
- 1 cup white or apple cider vinegar (or for single-use, try fresh citrus fruits or herbs)

Combine equal parts warm water and vinegar in a glass bottle. Add 10-20 drops of your favorite essential oil of choice – lemon and tea tree oil work well, but there are plenty of great combinations. Place the cap on and shake vigorously. Use as you would any other all-purpose cleaner for wood, glass, stainless steel, and porcelain. Wipe with a microfiber cloth or paper towel. Before using on a new surface, it's always recommended to test a small area first to ensure it doesn't cause any damage.



Kitchen Deodorizing Cleanser

- 4 tablespoons baking soda
- 1 quart warm water

For best results, combine ingredients in a large bowl or pitcher and stir until the baking soda is well-dissolved. Recommended by the Good Housekeeping Institute Cleaning Lab, this cleanser is great for kitchen counters, sinks, appliances, and the inside of your refrigerator. Just place it on a sponge or paper towel and wipe until clean.



Glass Cleaner

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup vinegar (white or apple cider)
- ¼ cup vodka*
- 1 to 2 drops essential oil for scent

Combine ingredients and store in a glass spray bottle. This is a great, natural way to clean your windows, mirrors, or any glass surface. To avoid streaking, first spray the solution on a paper towel or soft cloth instead of directly on the glass. *Note: we chose to use vodka in this recipe since (unlike rubbing alcohol) it is deemed safe for human consumption and doesn't cause respiratory problems if inhaled.*