

GREENER CLEANERS

Surprisingly, the most environmentally damaging objects in our houses tend to be found hiding under the kitchen sink or lurking in the cleaning cupboard. Among all those bottles and cans there are all sorts

of harmful combinations of toxic bleaches and chemical-based polishes and disinfectants that can be seriously damaging both to humans and to the environment.

ECO ALTERNATIVES

Several years ago we switched from using artificially produced cleaning products to eco alternatives. Many of the cleaners we now use are made from simple home-made recipes that originate from old-fashioned cleaning techniques. As well as being less harmful to humans, animals, and the environment, they are also cheaper. We are reducing packaging waste as we've stopped buying new bottles and packets over and over again.

We also find that, having stopped using conventional products that always seem to promise to "kill 110 per cent of all germs", we have become noticeably more sensitive to the noxious smell of commercial cleaners. These days we much prefer the aroma of our natural alternatives, many of which are outlined here for you to make and enjoy yourself.

BICARBONATE OF SODA

Also known as sodium bicarbonate, baking soda, or simply bicarb, this naturally occurring substance is extremely cheap and will not harm you or the environment.

To deal with a smelly carpet, sprinkle baking soda over the carpet. Add dried crushed lavender or basil leaves and leave for 30 minutes. Vacuum thoroughly afterwards.

To clean work surfaces, apply baking soda and scrub with a damp cloth or sponge. To remove ingrained dirt or stains, use a brush.

To clean the oven, sprinkle the mess with some salt and then mix 2 tbsp of baking soda with water in a cup to make a thin paste and apply to the oven surface. Use an old toothbrush or bristle brush to scrub it off.

For clogged sinks and shower drains,

try to avoid using conventional drain cleaners in your home because they contain particularly nasty ingredients. If you have a blocked drain, pour in a cup of white vinegar plus one cup of baking soda. Let that sit for a few minutes (don't panic - it's normal for it to bubble like Vesuvius). Then flush the mixture down with a kettle of boiling water.

SOAP NUTS

A soap nuts is actually a fruit that contains a natural surfactant that works like a normal detergent to break down dirt and grease in water. They leave laundry clean but can also be used for cleaning floors or even as shampoo. The aroma is less pronounced than chemical cleaners we're used to, so we'd recommend adding your favourite essential oils to your laundry to provide a fresher smell.

DISTILLED VINEGAR

Also known as clear or white vinegar, distilled vinegar is another great cleaner for the home as well as an effective deodorizer. Any kind of vinegar will do, but we recommend distilled as its smell is less likely to linger than other types. This is the only issue that we have with using vinegar - the smell reminds us of being in a fish and

- 1. Bicarbonate of soda** is a very efficient cleaner. Sprinkle it over a surface and then wipe off with a damp cloth.
- 2. For a blocked drain**, combine bicarbonate of soda with distilled vinegar in the proportions described above.
- 3. Spray a mix** of vinegar and water (see opposite page) onto windows to clean them.
- 4. Wipe half a lemon** over your chopping block to clean and deodorize it.

chip shop. However, mixing in lavender essential oil and/or lemon juice is a very effective way to mask the smell.

If you are using a vinegar cleaner on tiles or marble, always be sure to rinse the cleaned area well because it can continue to react with any lime-based product.

To clean windows, mix 120ml (4fl oz) vinegar with 4 litres (1 gallon) of water and use to wipe down your windows.

For extra shine, try rubbing the window glass dry with a couple of sheets of screwed up newspaper.

Use as a fabric conditioner. A splash of white vinegar in the final rinse leaves your clothes, sheets, and towels soft and absorbent. It has the added benefit of breaking down the detergent more effectively, thus keeping the washing machine drum clean. It is especially useful for family members who have sensitive skin or allergies. Don't worry -

any smell of the vinegar goes when the clothes are dry.

For a basic furniture polish, mix 60ml (2fl oz) vinegar with 175ml (6fl oz) olive oil. Alternatively, mix 60ml (2fl oz) lemon juice with 120ml (4fl oz) olive oil. Wipe down your furniture with a soft cloth soaked in the solution for excellent eco-cleaning results.

LEMON JUICE

This everyday liquid is a mild, yet very effective, green cleaner. You can use lemon juice as a non-toxic way of removing grease and also as an effective antibacterial in many parts of your home.

To remove stains, squeeze some neat lemon juice over any tough stains on your chopping board, let the juice sit there for about 10 minutes, then wipe it away.

To freshen and deodorize your microwave, place a few slices of lemon

in a small bowl of water and heat it for 30-45 seconds. Use the hot liquid to wipe down all the surfaces in the microwave.

For everyday toilet cleaning, sprinkle some lemon juice and baking soda into your toilet and leave it to fizz for a few minutes, and then scrub it clean with a toilet brush.

HERBAL CLEANERS

Choose one fresh herb, such as lavender, juniper, or thyme. Simmer a handful of the leaves and stems in a pan of water for about 30 minutes. Add a little more water - the less you add, the stronger the solution and the more powerful its properties. Strain the liquid and pour it into a bottle with a dash of natural soap. This herbal solution cuts through grease and smells good too.

RECIPE Natural hand scrub

Keeping your hands clean can be expensive, especially using squirty hand cleaners, so we started making our own scrub to keep next to the washroom sink. Our recipe is basically a salt and oil scrub, infused with soothing calendula, which we have found to be excellent at removing garden grime. Use it regularly and you'll find that it is also a great moisturizer for the skin.

YOU WILL NEED

- Rock salt
- Calendula flowers
- Calendula oil
- Small jar

- 1. To make the scrub**, put a 5cm (2in) layer of rock salt in the bottom of a jar.
- 2. Mix the salt** with some dried calendula flowers and then cover with calendula oil.
- 3. To use**, scoop a small amount of the scrub and use it like normal hand soap. Wash off with warm water. If you don't like calendula, try this recipe with your preferred blend of dried flowers and oil.

