

Alternatives for Household Products: Helpful Hazardous Waste Reduction Hints

Create a safer environment at home and reduce excessive packaging waste by using simple alternatives to common chemical household products.

NOTE: These options are offered as alternatives to other commercial products. They are not the only methods to clean your home, and usually require more 'elbow grease' than commercial products do to be effective.

COMMERCIAL PRODUCT ALTERNATIVES

AROUND THE HOUSE

- **Room Deodorizer:** At least 2 to 4 tablespoons of baking soda, or 1/2 to 1 cup of cat litter used in trash cans, or 1 cup of vinegar in a dish will absorb odors. Cross-ventilation and fragrant potpourri will also help to freshen air. Replace every 3 months. Boil cinnamon and cloves in a sachet of cheesecloth to scent the air.
- **Floor Cleaner:** Wash brick, slate, ceramic tile, and no-wax floors with 1/2 cup of white vinegar mixed in 1/2 gallon of warm water.
- **Laundry:** Eliminate soap residue by adding 1 cup of white vinegar to the final rinse water. DO NOT use chlorine bleach and vinegar together- you will produce harmful vapors. Add 1/4 to 1/2 cup of baking soda to the rinse cycle to make clothes feel soft and smell fresh.
- **Silver Polish:** Make a paste using baking soda and water. Rub with a soft cloth, rinse, and polish dry. Wear cotton or plastic (not rubber) gloves when cleaning silver. Or, place a sheet of aluminum foil in the bottom of a large flat pan. Add 2 to 3 inches of water, 1 teaspoon of baking soda, 1 teaspoon of salt, and bring to a boil. Add silver pieces, making sure the water covers them completely and boil for 2 or 3 minutes. Remove the silver, rinse, and buff with a soft cloth.
- **Furniture Polish:** A soap and water solution can be used for washing finished furniture. Mix 3 parts olive oil to 1 part vinegar OR mix 2 parts vegetable or olive oil with 1 part lemon juice. Apply and polish with a clean, soft cloth.
- **Moth Balls:** Cedar blocks placed in airtight containers are excellent for storing woolens. Cedar blocks can be used many times over by sanding to bring out the cedar aroma.

- **Window Cleaner:** Mix 1 part white vinegar and 1 part water in a spray bottle. Apply, then dry with a soft cloth. To remove stubborn hard water spots and streaks, use undiluted vinegar OR mix 1 tablespoon lemon juice in 1 quart of water. Apply to surface and wipe dry with a soft cloth.

IN THE GARDEN/YARD

- **Insect Repellent:** Use repellents made from distillates of cedar wood, orange, eucalyptus, and bay leaves for house sprays and flea collars.
- **Pesticide:** Beneficial predators (ladybugs, spiders, frogs), companion plants (African and French marigolds, thyme, garlic), biological pesticides (B.t., *Bacillus popilliae*) and hand picking or pulling can minimize pests and weeds. Traps (shallow container of beer to trap slugs, sticky bands around tree trunks to trap gypsy moth caterpillars, flypaper), and barriers (wood ash or diatomaceous earth around the base of plant, floating row cover over vegetables, mesh netting over fruit plants) also control certain pests. Look for herbicidal and insecticidal soap sprays and horticultural oils as a safer means of controlling pests.

IN THE BATHROOM

- **Disinfectant:** Sponge on isopropyl alcohol and allow to dry. Be sure to use in a well-ventilated area. In order to be effective, the alcohol MUST be allowed to dry.
- **Drain Cleaner/Opener:** Pour approximately 1/2 cup of baking soda down the drain. Add 1/2 cup of vinegar and cover drain opening, if possible. Let stand for a few minutes, then pour a kettle of boiling water down the drain. This will unclog and deodorize drains. A mechanical snake or plunger will manually unclog drains. Use a drain strainer to catch food and hair before they go down the drain. These techniques work in the kitchen, too.
- **Tub and Tile Cleaner:** Use white vinegar full-strength on mold and mildew stains. Add 1/4 cup (or more) of vinegar to 1 gallon of warm water to clean most dirt. To remove film buildup on tubs, wipe full-strength vinegar on with a sponge, then use baking soda or borax like you would scouring powder. Rub with a damp sponge, then rinse with clean water. To prevent soap scum and mildew buildup in the shower, wipe walls dry after every use.
- **Toilet Bowl Cleaner:** Sprinkle baking soda in bowl, then drizzle with vinegar and scour with toilet brush. This cleans and deodorizes.

IN THE KITCHEN

- **Oven Cleaner:** Rub stains with paste of baking soda, salt, and hot water; rinse well. For baked-on stains, warm oven to 200 °F, turn oven off, leave 1/4 cup of ammonia in a small dish near spill overnight. Wipe clean with warm, soapy water. Avoid baked-on stains by wiping out oven after every use.
- **Pot & Pans and Faucets:** To remove lime and mineral deposits, boil equal parts of vinegar and water until deposits loosen. This solution effectively cleans aluminum or chrome, and when mixed with salt it works well on brass, bronze, and copper.
- **Kitchen/Bathroom Surfaces:** Use baking soda on a damp sponge to clean and deodorize all kitchen and bathroom surfaces.

Resources:

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