



**WHEN
YOU WANT
YOUR
CLEAN**

**TO
BE MORE
GREEN**

**Experts share the best
ways to clean
your home while loving
your home planet.**

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THE DOWN & DIRTY ON SUPPLIES

Brush up on the powers—
and limitations—of
your cleaning staples.



VINEGAR

DOES: Sanitize.

Yeah, the stuff you use for salad dressing is also great at slashing bacteria. “You can go a long way toward reducing organisms by rubbing a surface with distilled white vinegar and water,” says Philip Tierno, PhD, clinical professor of microbiology and pathology at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine.

DOESN'T: Disinfect.

To disinfect, an ingredient must kill nearly all the microbes on a surface, which vinegar does not do. It's strongest (and, unfortunately, smelliest) in its undiluted form, says Jason Tetro, a microbiologist and the author of *The Germ Code*. The more water you add, the less effective it becomes.

GOOD TO KNOW: You can use a vinegar-and-water solution on some kitchen and bathroom countertops, on glass, and in the washing machine, but avoid using it on marble, granite, stone, and wood, because the acidity can damage the surface. To lift stuck-on grime, add baking soda to your vinegar solution and watch it bubble up.



ESSENTIAL OILS

DO: Make DIY cleaners smell great. “Essential oils help vinegar-based cleaning solutions become a bit more pleasant, especially if you're new to green cleaning,” says Becky Rapinchuk, a cleaning expert and the author of *Clean Mama's Guide to a Healthy Home*. Choose oils labeled “100 percent pure” (like those from Plant Therapy), she adds, to make sure they don't contain unnecessary additives.

DON'T: Always sanitize or disinfect. Studies have shown that clove and cinnamon essential oils may possess antibacterial properties, but they're not powerful enough to be the only sanitizing agent in DIY cleaning solutions. If you're looking for an essential-oil-based product that can serve as a natural disinfectant (and not just a sanitizer), go for one with thyme oil as the active ingredient, Tierno suggests.

GOOD TO KNOW: If you want to keep your cleaning routine completely au naturel, remove the very top layer (avoiding the pith) from an orange or lemon with a vegetable peeler. Add it to your spray bottle of vinegar water for a pleasant aroma.

SANITIZE VS. DISINFECT: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

No, they're not the same thing. Sanitizing reduces the number of germs on surfaces to a safe level; disinfecting actually kills almost all the germs.



CHLORINE BLEACH

DOES: Disinfect.

No DIY solution disinfects quite as well as bleach, and even some experts who clean mostly green have it on hand. “Under my sink right now, you'll find baking soda, vinegar, dish soap, and a bottle of bleach,” says Charles MacPherson, author of *The Pocket Butler's Guide to Good Housekeeping*. To properly disinfect surfaces after you or a housemate gets sick, use one-third cup of bleach per gallon of water. To disinfect after handling raw meat, use one tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water.

DOESN'T: Immediately result in environmental catastrophe—at least with careful, every-once-in-a-while household use. Bleach can be harmful in high concentrations, but a bit of bleach diluted with water going down your drain is acceptable.

GOOD TO KNOW: Nonchlorine bleach is gentler than chlorine bleach (it uses hydrogen peroxide to lift stains from clothing). However, there are no non-chlorine bleach products registered as disinfectants with the Environmental Protection Agency.





STEAM

DOES: Sanitize without the use of chemicals. Superheated vapor is the ultimate green cleaner because it's just water, says Donna Smallin Kuper, a certified housecleaning technician. It can significantly reduce bacteria (the high temps essentially incinerate them), and the hot moisture loosens embedded dirt and grime, letting you use less elbow grease.

DOESN'T: Work everywhere. On painted surfaces, like walls and furniture, steam can cause peeling. On certain other surfaces, like brick, marble, and wood, it can lead to buckling or warping.

GOOD TO KNOW: You can sanitize floor tiles with a steam mop. Try a handheld version, like Bissell's Steam Shot Handheld Hard Surface Steam Cleaner (\$40; bissell.com), on sealed countertops, glass shower doors, and even mattresses. Allergy sufferers may benefit from steam cleaning, as the process helps kill dust mites.



WASTE LESS

In addition to cutting back on wipes, focus on the number of packaged cleaners you own and what you can live without or DIY instead. Consider using up what you have, even if it's not a product you'd purchase again, then thoroughly clean spray bottles and fill them with your homemade solutions, suggests cleaning expert Melissa Maker. If you want to immediately get rid of the packaged goods, ask a friend or neighbor if they would like to finish them. Recycle whatever you can—check with your local recycling program on how to handle different types of plastics or aerosols.



MICROFIBER CLOTHS

DO: Clean better than paper towels or cotton rags. As the name implies, microfiber cloths are made up of teeny-tiny synthetic fibers, each of which helps pick up more debris than that wad of paper towels. They can also leave windows streak-free, whereas cotton rags may deposit lint.

DON'T: Biodegrade. When you wash them, they can shed microscopic strands of plastic that end up in our waterways. Consider installing a Filtrol (\$140; filtrol.net) in your washing machine to catch those fibers and minimize pollution from all your laundry.

GOOD TO KNOW: Cotton cleaning cloths and cellulose-cotton Swedish dishcloths are sustainable and biodegradable (when they eventually wear out).



DISPOSABLE WIPES

DO: Disinfect when you're in a pinch. (We agree: Keeping a tub of these in your car is incredibly convenient.)

DON'T: Decompose. Most cleaning wipes are not biodegradable and can clog up sewer systems. In 2017, an 820-foot-long "fatberg," or huge mass of solid waste containing sanitary products (like wipes) and cooking grease, was discovered in a London sewer.

GOOD TO KNOW: A reusable cloth without disinfectant is a fine option for routine cleaning, according to the Environmental Working Group.



TRICLOSAN

DOES: Kill microbes. For decades, it's been a popular additive to products like soap and toothpaste.

DOESN'T: Keep you safe from all dangerous strains of bacteria. A few studies have suggested that when exposed to triclosan, bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics. Triclosan was banned by the FDA, but only from certain soaps.

GOOD TO KNOW: The FDA requires manufacturers to list ingredients. Companies like Procter & Gamble and SC Johnson post ingredients online. Rapinchuk suggests also researching items on third-party sites (such as ewg.org) or apps (Think Dirty, Shop Clean). Products with the Green Seal, Greenguard, or EPA's SaferChoice logo have been certified safer for people and the planet.



I CALL MY
CLEANING
“LIGHT
GREEN”

BY RORY
EVANS

I ONCE SPENT A WEEK with my neck in a brace after brushing my teeth too vigorously. I like things to be *cuh-leeannn*. During the mid-1990s, when in-line skating was the new thing, I got a pair of Rollerblades and the full complement of joint protectors. The skates I used for roughly 47 minutes one sunny April day in 1996, but I've worn the kneepads to scrub my bathroom's tiled floors for a satisfying two-plus decades.










Because if it's not a scene out of Dickens, I find it hard to believe I'm really getting something clean. By extension, I've often looked askance at natural cleaning. How could the same yellow orbs my daughter turns into the stickiest ant trap of a pitcher of lemonade get my countertops shiny and spotless? Intellectually, I get it. But emotionally: Get Mama her Fantastik!

Lately, though, I've been leaning into the idea of taking my cleaning to the "light green" place—because surely every little bit counts. I now buy surface cleaners in the concentrated vials and mix a bit with water in a reusable spray bottle that (following in the carbon footprints of those kneepads) sees a good long life ahead of it. Whenever possible, I buy the products with fewer, natural ingredients. And oh glory! The limitless applications of baking soda, which I purchase in those cereal-size boxes. I use it to scour the sinks, tubs, stovetop, and fridge shelves.

It has also made the leap into my personal-care routine. I dump handfuls of it into my shampoo as a scalp exfoliant and sprinkle it onto my Oral-B for brushing my teeth. Which, yes, of course, I still do with excessive gusto. But that's between me, my periodontist...and my chiropractor.

ELEVATE YOUR ECO-CLEANERS

Spruce up your home with these grime busters—each of which has an earth-friendly spin.

| | WHY WE LOVE IT | KICK IT UP A NOTCH |
|--|---|---|
|  FOR GLASS Windex with Vinegar in 100% Ocean Bound Plastic Bottles | Hailed as the world's first bottle of glass cleaner made from 100 percent recycled ocean plastic collected in Haiti, the Philippines, and Indonesia. | When you're cleaning mirrors, Maker suggests wiping in an S pattern to avoid streaks. |
|  FOR COUNTERTOPS Force of Nature | Donna Smallin Kuper raves about this electronic spray bottle, which zaps water, salt, and vinegar into a sanitizer. | The vinegar here is electrolyzed (so an electric current changes the composition of the vinegar with the other ingredients), making it safe to use on sealed stone, like granite. |
|  FOR DISHES Dawn Pure Essentials Dishwashing Liquid | A favorite brand among cleaning experts, Dawn now offers a dish soap formulated with biodegradable ingredients and essential oils. | Simply add a few drops of this gentle dish soap to water to clean marble and granite. |
|  FOR KITCHENS Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day Baking Soda Cream Cleaner | This baking soda paste has enough oomph to cut through hardened grease on your stove. | Think beyond your cooktop and use this cleaner to make your pots and pans, sink, and faucet sparkle. |
|  FOR DOORKNOBS Seventh Generation Disinfectant Spray | Thyme oil is the star ingredient, so it's safe to spritz around kids. | Use this spray whenever you need to disinfect, but allow it to sit for 10 minutes to help eliminate the bacteria. |
|  FOR BATHROOMS Mr. Clean Clean Freak Deep Cleaning Mist | Not only does the continuous-spray setting cover a huge surface area, but the spray nozzle is reusable. Just unscrew the empty bottle and attach a new one. | Safe for use on stainless steel too. |
|  FOR FLOORS Bona Hardwood Floor Cleaner with Cedar Wood | Bona's water-based floor cleaner is simple to use—just spray and mop. Plus, it's Greenguard Gold certified for its low VOC emissions. | Use it with Kuper's pick: the Libman Wonder Mop. She loves that the detachable, microfiber head is easy to wring out and throw into the wash. |
|  LIQUID LAUNDRY DETERGENT Arm & Hammer Clean & Simple | One of Arm & Hammer's newest innovations has just six ingredients. | Skip the hot water—this detergent works well in cold too, which requires less energy. |
|  FABRIC SOFTENER 9 Elements Purifying Softener | Not a fabric softener in the traditional sense, this rinse has a high concentration of vinegar that can remove years of residue and helps restore color. | If you have stubborn underarm stains on a well-worn shirt, give it a spin with this rinse. |

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