TRIED AND TRUE RECIPES FOR A LESS HAZARDOUS HOME

Household cleaning is an ancient chore and people tidied up without fancy chemicals for a long time. Simpler times called for simpler cleaners that still work today.

These remedies were drawn from a number of sources. Although they are usually less hazardous than popular products, they should still be used with caution. Formal research or consumer test groups have not tested their effectiveness. When trying a new alternative, test it on a small, inconspicuous area first to be sure you'll get the results you want.

Most jobs can be accomplished with six simple ingredients mixed with water, vinegar, soap, baking soda, washing soda, borax and ammonia. Even so, handle these compounds carefully. Ammonia in particular irritates eyes, nose and lungs. Wear gloves and eye protection when mixing and working with ammonia in these recipes and clearly label the container of all cleaning solutions you concoct.

The Basic Cleaning Kit

White Vinegar: Dissolves grease and mineral accumulation.
Borax: Disinfects and deodorizes.
Baking Soda: Deodorizes and is mildly abrasive.
Washing Soda: Cuts grease, removes stains, softens water.
Non-Detergent Soap: Loosens dirt.

Recipes

All-purpose Cleaner: Mix one gallon hot water with 1/4 cup of white vinegar, or mix one teaspoon borax into one quart of hot water. Add a squeeze of lemon juice or a splash of vinegar to cut grease. Rinse with water.
Scouring Powder: Dampen a sponge with baking soda and scrub.
Toilet Bowl Cleaner: Pour one-cup vinegar into the toilet bowl, then toss in a handful of baking soda. The mixture will foam. When the foam subsides, scrub and rinse.
Disinfectant: Mix 1/2-cup borax and 1/4 cup vinegar in two gallons of very hot water. For a stronger disinfectant, add more borax.

Air-Freshener

Herbal potpourri or cotton balls soaked in vanilla are sweet smelling. Also try boiling cinnamon and cloves in a small amount of water. An open box of baking soda absorbs refrigerator odors. Borax sprinkled in the bottom of a garbage can control odors.

Ant Control

Ants will avoid lines of powders and sharp crystals. Sprinkle barriers of talcum powder, chalk, bone meal, cayenne pepper or boric acid across their trails. Industrial grade boric acid crystals are especially effective as they have little odor. Keep boric acid away from children and pets.

Ballpoint Pen Marks on Woodwork or Painted Walls

Dab with white vinegar on a clean cloth. Blot.

Bathroom Cleaner

Use baking soda to scrub surfaces clean. Rinse with clean water and wipe surfaces with a solution of 1/4-cup vinegar in a gallon of water.
Blood Stains

Club soda and cold water will remove fresh bloodstains. Blot it up with a clean cloth or paper towel.

Chocolate Stains

Blot the stain with club soda.

Rust Remover

Vinegar's weak acid works wonders on rust stains. Warmed vinegar coupled with some scrubbing will remove rust from dishes, sinks and your teapot.

Silver Cleaning

Baking soda and water or buttermilk makes fine silver soaking solutions. The fine abrasives in toothpaste will also brighten your silver jewelry with mild brushing. Also try boiling silver for two to three minutes in a mixture of one-cup water, one-teaspoon baking soda and one-teaspoon salt. Note: Place a piece of aluminum foil in the bottom of the pan before adding water, soda, salt and silverware. Rinse pieces well in water and dry with a soft cloth.

Sinks and Countertops

Use vinegar mixed with water and salt.

Spot Removers

To remove grease from garage floors, sprinkle the spot with dry cement or fresh cat litter. Let stand for a few hours, then sweep it up. Grease is absorbed by the dry clay or cement.

Stains

General household stains can be cleaned and disinfected with borax solutions.

Water-spotted Chrome and Faucets

Fill spray bottle with vinegar. Spray a little on fixtures and wipe away spots.

Window Cleaner

Use newspaper dipped in vinegar to scrub windows or, a mix of one quart water a few drops dishwashing detergent and two tablespoons of sudsy ammonia works well.

Wood Cleaning

Try oil soap product.

Wood Furniture Polish

Look for products containing pure oils like lemon oil, tung oil or almond oil without petroleum distillates. You can also make furniture polishes with a mixture of one part lemon juice to two parts mineral oil. Don't use vegetable oils to preserve wood because the oils eventually turn rancid and emit foul odors. Be aware that mineral oil is flammable and mineral spirits should not be used.

Wood Scratches

Mix one spoon each lemon juice and mineral oil. Gently rub into scratches - buff with soft, dry cloth.

Wooden Cutting Board Used with Meat


Sources: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources magazine, December 1990
University of Wisconsin Extension “At Home”, Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine

Finally, clean lightly, but more frequently to avoid the need for stronger cleaners. Use preventive strategies at home. Check your home for small spaces where pests can gain access. Learn about pest habits so you can supply the least hazardous alternative when pests are most vulnerable. Remember that your household can still be considered clean without a shiny, "spanking clean" look every day.

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