

Green Home Cleaning



A walk down any supermarket cleaning aisle will have your head spinning with the array of products we are led to believe we need to keep our homes 'sparkling'. Are they all necessary, and what impact do these products have on us and the environment?

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Keeping our homes clean is usually high on the list of priorities when doing the domestic shopping, and it's clearly a big business. The household cleaning aisle in your supermarket is packed with every conceivable product for shining, polishing and scenting your home. So is it any wonder that we are conditioned to believe we need so many individual products, when in fact various simple combinations of just a few would do the same job?

But where's the profit in that? So every time you switch on the TV it seems there is a new wonder cleaning product being advertised to rival the last.

But what does this mean for us, and the environment we're living in?

There are over 80,000 man-made chemicals in use today and only about 2% of these have been properly tested to see if they are safe for human use. The World Health Organisation agrees that half of the cancers that occur in the Western world are triggered by coming into contact with toxins in our environment. It stands to reason that with the increasing number of toxic chemicals produced each year, this must be a contributing factor in the sharp increase in diagnosed cases of cancer in recent years.

But it's not just cancer we should be concerned about

Studies are linking exposure to unsafe chemicals with a wide variety of other problems, including fatigue, memory loss, personality change, headaches, sleep disturbance, visual disturbance, aches and pains, sexual dysfunction and the disruption of immune, nervous, endocrine and reproductive systems. Exposure can also lead to a condition known as multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), which can cause someone to have adverse reactions to even very low levels of chemicals.

This could obviously have far-reaching implications for the long term survival of all living organisms on the planet.

So what do we really 'need'?

In actual fact, we 'need' very little. Just a few good staples are all that is required to clean just about every corner of the house effectively, leaving you with a heavier purse, and more vital cupboard space to fill as you wish.

A simple, lightly dampened clean cloth, for example, is far better for wiping away dust than an aerosol furniture polish spray. The cloth will grab the dust, preventing it from dispersing up into the air only to settle back down again where you've just cleaned. It will also wipe away light smudges and finger marks from most surfaces. Of course, a damp cloth is not always going to be man enough for every cleaning task. There are fatty or greasy deposits, and limescale to consider too. For these, simple bicarbonate of soda and distilled vinegar used individually or in combination should do the trick.

Sodium bicarbonate

Also known as bicarbonate of soda, baking soda or bicarb. This is a naturally occurring substance that will not harm you or the environment. When mixed with water it easily cuts through grease and dirt on most surfaces. Used alone, it has a mildly abrasive action but for maximum cleaning power, mix it with distilled vinegar and watch the fizzing reaction blast away the dirt. It also deodorises unpleasant pongs, and smothers fires, so always keep a tub near to the kitchen hob in case of emergencies, and sprinkle a little into your kitchen bin, or even into ashtrays to prevent smouldering **and** reduce odour.

Distilled vinegar

Also known as clear or white vinegar. This is another great cleaner as well as an effective disinfectant and deodoriser. This naturally acidic substance will quickly neutralise alkalis when applied. Any kind of vinegar will do, but distilled is recommended as the others all contain particles which hold scents that will linger whereas distilled vinegar does not, so any smell will disappear as soon as it's dried. Always be sure to rinse the area well if using it to clean tiles or marble as the vinegar can continue to react with any lime-based product if not washed away thoroughly.

Using vinegar as a replacement for fabric conditioner has the added benefit of breaking down the washing detergent more effectively, so keeping the washing machine drum clean, and leaving clothes soft and absorbent. This is especially useful for family members who have sensitive skin or allergies and don't worry – any smell goes when the clothes are dried!

Essential oils

These are fantastically useful for their many benefits. Just one drop of essential oil on a sticky mark will help to dissolve it with ease. Many household products contain Orange Oil purely for this purpose but the majority of essential oils will act in exactly the same way. Some also have very potent antibacterial properties, with those of spices and herbs such as Thyme, Oregano, Mint, Cinnamon, Salvia and Clove being the strongest. All of these have been used extensively in medicine for many centuries.

A good search engine such as Google will locate plenty more useful information on the Internet about how to use each of the above.