



## Fact Sheet: Safe Substitutes at Home: Non-toxic Household Products

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**There are many inexpensive, easy-to-use natural alternatives which can safely be used in place of commercial household products. Here are some non-toxic strategies for common household tasks.**

**Freshen air** by opening windows and doors for a short period; distribute partially filled dishes of vinegar around the kitchen to combat unpleasant cooking odors; boil cinnamon and cloves in a pan of water to scent the air; sprinkle 1/2 cup borax in the bottom of garbage pails or diaper pails to inhibit mold and bacteria growth that can cause odors; rub vinegar or mild lemon soap on hands before and after slicing onions to remove the smell; use bowls of potpourri to give inside air a pleasant scent.

**All-purpose cleaner** can be made from a vinegar-and-salt mixture or from 4 tablespoons baking soda dissolved in 1 quart warm water.

**Disinfectant** means anything that will reduce the number of harmful bacteria on a surface. Practically no surface treatment will completely eliminate bacteria. Try regular cleaning with soap and hot water. Or mix 1/2 cup borax into 1 gallon of hot water to disinfect and deodorize. Isopropyl alcohol is an excellent disinfectant, but use gloves and keep it away from children.

**Drain cleaner.** Try a plunger first, though not after using any commercial drain opener. To open clogs, pour 1/2 cup baking soda down drain, add 1/2 cup white vinegar, and cover the drain. The resulting chemical reaction can break fatty acids down into the soap and glycerine, allowing the clog to wash down the drain. Do not use this method after trying a commercial drain opener--the vinegar can react with the drain opener to create dangerous fumes.

**Floor cleaner and polish** can be as simple as a few drops of vinegar in the cleaning water to remove soap traces. For vinyl or linoleum, add a capful of baby oil to the water to preserve and polish. For wood floors, apply a thin coat of 1:1 oil and vinegar and rub in well. For painted wooden floors, mix 1 teaspoon washing soda into 1 gallon hot water. For brick and stone tiles, use 1 cup white vinegar in 1 gallon water and rinse with clear water.

**Metal cleaners and polishes** are different for each metal -- just as in commercial cleaners. Clean aluminum with a solution of cream of tartar and water. Brass may be polished with a soft cloth dipped in lemon-and baking-soda solution, or vinegar- and-salt solution. Polish chrome with baby oil, vinegar, or aluminum foil shiny side out. Clean tarnished copper by boiling the article in a pot of water with 1 tablespoon salt and 1 cup white vinegar, or try differing mixtures of salt, vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice, and cream of tartar. Clean gold with toothpaste, pewter with a paste of salt, vinegar, and flour. Silver can be polished by boiling it in a pan lined with aluminum foil and filled with water to which a teaspoon each of baking soda and salt have been added. Stainless steel can be cleaned with undiluted white vinegar.

**Oven cleaner.** Sprinkle baking soda on moist surface and scrub with steel wool. Or use Arm & Hammer Oven Cleaner, declared nontoxic by Consumers Union.

**Scouring powder** can be made from baking soda or dry table salt. Or try Bon-Ami Cleaning Powder or Bon-Ami Polishing Cleaner.

**Toilet bowl cleaner** can be made from baking soda and vinegar, or borax and lemon juice.

**Tub and tile cleaner** can be as easy as rubbing in baking soda with a damp sponge and rinsing, or wiping with vinegar first and following with baking soda as a scouring powder.

**Window and glass cleaner** is easy with these tips: to avoid streaks, don't wash windows when the sun is shining. Use a vinegar-and-water solution, cornstarch-vinegar-and-water solution, or lemon-juice-and-water. Wipe with newspaper unless you are sensitive to the inks in newspaper.

### **Safe Substitutes for Laundry Products**

Detergent is specially adapted to clean synthetic fabrics, and it has the added advantage of not leaving soil residues even in hard water. However, detergents are generally derived from petrochemicals, and people sensitive to these compounds may find it hard to tolerate detergents or the fragrances they are scented with. In addition, most detergents contain phosphates, which build up in streams and lakes and upset the natural balance in waterways, causing blooms of algae which deplete the dissolved oxygen fish need to live. Some detergent may even contain naphthalene or phenol, both hazardous substances.

An effective alternative to using detergents is to return to soap. Soap is an effective cleaner for natural fabrics, leaving such items as diapers softer than detergent can. For cotton and linen, use soap to soften water. A cup of vinegar added to the wash can help keep colors bright (but DO NOT use vinegar if you are using bleach -- the resulting fumes are hazardous). One-half to three-quarters of a cup of baking soda will leave clothes soft and fresh smelling. Silks and wools may be hand washed with mild soap or a protein shampoo.

For synthetic fabrics or blends (including most no-iron fabrics), there are biodegradable detergents on the market that do not contain phosphates, fragrances, or harsh chemicals.

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