

Ideas for a Non-toxic Home

There are many alternatives to using chemical cleaning products found in regular stores. In Tulare County plant-based alternative cleaning products and non-chlorine bleached paper goods from companies such as Seventh Generation, Ecover, Bio-Kleen, etc., are difficult to find in stores. There is, however, a line of cleaning products at Target called "Method" that say they are made from plants with essential oil fragrances.

Many plant-based products are available in stores such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's in Fresno or by mail order. There are many books and websites on this subject - see our bibliography for a list of some of them. Also, don't hesitate to try any "hints" you come across that use everyday ingredients. The book "Clean House, Clean Planet" by Karen Logan is a great way to get started.

Shopping:

- Baking soda - 4-lb boxes are about \$2.50, or better, the 10- or 12-lb box at Costco or Smart & Final is about \$4.00.
- Vinegar - less than \$2.00 a gallon at Costco or Smart & Final.
- Hydrogen peroxide - little brown bottles for less than 40¢ at stores like Wal-Mart, Target, Kmart, etc. or better 3/\$1 or 29¢.
- Buy dish soaps that are white or clear, such as "Method" or Ivory. Better, look for alternative brands such as Seventh Generation or Ecover in health food stores.
- Arm N Hammer laundry detergent has peroxide and baking soda in it and seems to have little fragrance. Better if you can find Seventh Generation or Ecover laundry soap, or Dr. Bronner's Sal Suds.
- There are many uses for lemon juice and olive oil.
- Have on hand several empty spray bottles and empty herb shaker containers. Always label the spray bottles with printed labels or write with a Sharpie pen.

Housecleaning:

Here's a recipe for a great all-purpose house cleaner - floors, walls, bathrooms, etc:

- Fill a clean quart spray bottle half full with vinegar, add an equal amount of water. Add a squirt or spoonful of dish soap. Add 10 drops or so of essential oils like orange, lemon, or peppermint to provide a great fragrance. Should last one or two housecleanings. Very inexpensive to use.
- When cleaning bathrooms with vinegar-based cleaner, spray sinks, toilets, bathtubs with peroxide too.
- Fill one spray bottles with hydrogen peroxide and another one with plain white vinegar. Spray kitchen counters, sinks, cutting boards with each one. Wipe down or just leave it there. Kills lots of germs.
- Put baking soda in old herb/spice shaker container and use on stoves, sinks, bath tubs, tires, etc. just like you use Comet or Ajax. Read the baking soda box. It's amazing how well it cleans greasy, messy pans and casserole dishes! Wet the surface first, shake baking soda on generously, and let sit for awhile.
- To make "soft scrub" put a spoonful of baking soda in a cup and add dish soap and a little water until you get a good paste. Great for bathtubs.

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- Make a “volcano” in your drains and toilets by putting in about ¼ cup of baking soda

followed by a good amount of vinegar (½ cup to 1 cup) - and watch it fizzle! Great at keeping drains running clean.

Laundry:

- One of the best ways to get your clothes cleaner is to using less laundry detergent. Sounds crazy, but here’s why. Detergent attracts dirt away from clothes, like a magnet. If there is too much detergent and it doesn’t all rinse out (ever tried washing a load with no soap and seeing all the suds left behind?) then you not only have leftover detergent, but also the dirt that went with it.
- Use ½ cup to 1 cup baking soda in the wash to soften and help clean.
- Put ¼ cup or so of vinegar in a “Downey ball” for the laundry rinse to remove any leftover detergent.
- For bleaching, use 1 cup or less of hydrogen peroxide for whites and colors.
- The “whiter than white” of laundry doesn’t come from bleaching, it comes from a florescent blue dye called “optical brighteners” that remains on your hands and can be seen under a “black” light (the old “bluing” technique). Hanging clothes out in the sun is a great way to make whites whiter.
- You may not need any other softeners. If static is a problem for non-cotton clothing, dryer sheets are still necessary (or add a plant-based fabric softener in the rinse). The ingredients of commercial fabric softeners are not disclosed and many people have trouble with fragrance and allergic reactions. Try softeners that are “free” and “clear”.

Hand Soap:

There are a couple alternatives to using antibacterial hand soap (with triclosan) - plain bar soap, or if you like your liquid soap dispensers, put diluted dish soap in them. If you would like an antiseptic agent use tea tree oil - EIS Consulting sells essential oils - or go to Watson’s in downtown Visalia, the Crystal Barn, or any other health food store to buy tea tree oil - add 20 drops to your soap, or get Dr. Bronner’s Soap with Tea Tree Oil - use diluted half with water in your liquid soap dispensers.

It is more important to just wash your hands than what you use!