

Home Care Formulas

Combinations of the above basic products can provide less harmful substitutions for many commercial home products. In most cases, they're also less expensive. Here are some formulas for safe, alternative home care products:

Note: These formulas and substitutions are offered to help minimize the use of toxic substances in your home, and reduce the environmental harm caused by the manufacture, use and disposal of toxics. Results may vary and cannot be guaranteed to be 100% safe and effective. Before applying any cleaning formulations, test in small hidden areas if possible. Always use caution with any new product in your home.

Make sure to keep all home-made formulas well-labeled, and out of the reach of children.

All-Purpose Cleaner: Mix 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/4 cup baking soda (or 2 teaspoons borax) into 1/2 gallon (2 liters) water. Store and keep. Use for removal of water deposit stains on shower stall panels, bathroom chrome fixtures, windows, bathroom mirrors, etc.

Another alternative are microfiber cloths which lift off dirt, grease and dust without the need for cleaning chemicals, because they are formulated to penetrate and trap dirt. There are a number of different brands. A good quality cloth can last for several years.

Air Freshener:

Commercial air fresheners mask smells and coat nasal passages to diminish the sense of smell.

- Baking soda or vinegar with lemon juice in small dishes absorbs odors around the house.
- Having houseplants helps reduce odors in the home.
- Prevent cooking odors by simmering vinegar (1 tbsp in 1 cup water) on the stove while cooking. To get such smells as fish and onion off utensils and cutting boards, wipe them with vinegar and wash in soapy water.
- Keep fresh coffee grounds on the counter.
- Grind up a slice of lemon in the garbage disposal.
- Simmer water and cinnamon or other spices on stove.
- Place bowls of fragrant dried herbs and flowers in room.

Bathroom mold:

Mold in bathroom tile grout is a common problem and can be a health concern. Mix one part hydrogen peroxide (3%) with two parts water in a spray bottle and spray on areas with mold. Wait at least one hour before rinsing or using shower

Carpet stains:

Mix equal parts white vinegar and water in a spray bottle. Spray directly on stain, let sit for several minutes, and clean with a brush or sponge using warm soapy water.

For fresh grease spots, sprinkle corn starch onto spot and wait 15 - 30 minutes before vacuuming.

For a heavy duty carpet cleaner, mix 1/4 cup each of salt, borax and vinegar. Rub paste into carpet and leave for a few hours. Vacuum.

Chopping block cleaner: Rub a slice of lemon across a chopping block to disinfect the surface. For tougher stains, squeeze some of the lemon juice onto the spot and let sit for 10 minutes, then wipe.

Coffee and tea stains: Stains in cups can be removed by applying vinegar to a sponge and wiping. To clean a teakettle or coffee maker, add 2 cups water and 1/4 cup vinegar; bring to a boil. Let cool, wipe with a clean cloth and rinse thoroughly with water.

Deodorize:

- Plastic food storage containers - soak overnight in warm water and baking soda
- In-sink garbage disposal units - grind up lemon or orange peel in the unit
- Carpets - sprinkle baking soda several hours before vacuuming
- Garage, basements - set a sliced onion on a plate in center of room for 12 - 24 hours

Dishwasher Soap:

Mix equal parts of borax and washing soda, but increase the washing soda if your water is hard.

If you want to use a commercial dishwashing soap, try Nellie's All-Natural dishwasher powder, which contains no bleach or phosphates.

Dishwashing Soap:

Commercial low-phosphate detergents are not themselves harmful, but phosphates nourish algae which use up oxygen in waterways. A detergent substitution is to use liquid soap. Add 2 or 3 tablespoons of vinegar to the warm, soapy water for tough jobs.

Disinfectant:

Mix 2 teaspoons borax, 4 tablespoons vinegar and 3 cups hot water. For stronger cleaning power add 1/4 teaspoon liquid castile soap. Wipe on with dampened cloth or use non-aerosol spray bottle. (This is not an antibacterial formula. The average kitchen or bathroom does not require antibacterial cleaners.)

To disinfect kitchen sponges, put them in the dishwasher when running a load.

Drain Cleaner:

For light drain cleaning, mix 1/2 cup salt in 4 liters water, heat (but not to a boil) and pour down the drain. For stronger cleaning, pour about 1/2 cup baking soda down the drain, then 1/2 cup vinegar. The resulting chemical reaction can break fatty acids down into soap and glycerine, allowing the clog to wash down the drain. After 15 minutes, pour in boiling water to clear residue. Caution: only use this method with metal plumbing. Plastic pipes can melt if excess boiling water is used. Also, do not use this method after trying a commercial drain opener--the vinegar can react with the drain opener to create dangerous fumes.

Fabric softener:

To reduce static cling, dampen your hands, then shake out your clothes as you remove them from the drier. Line-drying clothing is another alternative.

Floor Cleaner and Polish:

Vinyl and linoleum: mix 1 cup vinegar and a few drops of baby oil in 1 gallon warm water. For tough jobs, add 1/4 cup borax. Use sparingly on linoleum.

wood:

apply a thin coat of 1:1 vegetable oil and vinegar and rub in well.

painted wood:

Mix 1 teaspoon washing soda into 1 gallon (4L) hot water.

Brick and stone tiles:

Mix 1 cup white vinegar in 1 gallon (4L) water; rinse with clear water.

Most floor surfaces can be easily cleaned using a solution of vinegar and water. For damp-mopping wood floors: mix equal amounts of white distilled vinegar and water. Add 15 drops of pure peppermint oil; shake to mix.

Furniture Polish:

For varnished wood, add a few drops of lemon oil into a 1/2 cup warm water. Mix well and spray onto a soft cotton cloth. Cloth should only be slightly damp. Wipe furniture with the cloth, and finish by wiping once more using a dry soft cotton cloth.

For unvarnished wood, mix two tsps each of olive oil and lemon juice and apply a small amount to a soft cotton cloth. Wring the cloth to spread the mixture further into the material and apply to the furniture using wide strokes. This helps distribute the oil evenly.

Laundry Detergent:

Mix 1 cup Ivory soap (or Fels Naptha soap), 1/2 cup washing soda and 1/2 cup borax. Use 1 tbsp for light loads; 2 tbsp for heavy loads. Commercial natural, biodegradable laundry detergents are also now available online and in select stores.

Lime Deposits:

You can reduce lime deposits in your teakettle by putting in 1/2 cup (125ml) white vinegar and 2 cups water, and gently boiling for a few minutes. Rinse well with fresh water while kettle is still warm.

To remove lime scale on bathroom fixtures, squeeze lemon juice onto affected areas and let sit for several minutes before wiping clean with a wet cloth.

Marks on walls and painted surfaces: Many ink spots, pencil, crayon or marker spots can be cleaned from painted surfaces using baking soda applied to a damp sponge. Rub gently, then wipe and rinse.

Metal Cleaners and Polishes:

Aluminum: using a soft cloth, clean with a solution of cream of tartar and water.

Brass or bronze: polish with a soft cloth dipped in lemon and baking-soda solution, or vinegar and salt solution. Another method is to apply a dab of ketchup on a soft cloth and rub over tarnished spots.

Chrome: polish with baby oil, vinegar, or aluminum foil shiny side out.

Copper: soak a cotton rag in a pot of boiling water with 1 tablespoon salt and 1 cup white vinegar. Apply to copper while hot; let cool, then wipe clean. For tougher jobs, sprinkle baking soda or lemon juice on a soft cloth, then wipe. For copper cookware, sprinkle a lemon wedge with salt, then scrub. A simpler method is to apply a dab of ketchup on a soft cloth and rub over tarnished spots.

Gold: clean with toothpaste, or a paste of salt, vinegar, and flour.

Silver: line a pan with aluminum foil and fill with water; add a teaspoon each of baking soda and salt. Bring to a boil and immerse silver. Polish with soft cloth.

Stainless steel: clean with a cloth dampened with undiluted white vinegar, or olive oil. For stainless cookware, mix 4 tbs baking soda in 1 qt water, and apply using a soft cloth. Wipe dry using a clean cloth. For stainless steel sinks, pour some club soda on an absorbent cloth to clean, then wipe dry using a clean cloth.

Mold and Mildew: Use white vinegar or lemon juice full strength. Apply with a sponge or scrubby.\

Mothballs: The common mothball is made of paradichlorobenzene, which is harmful to liver and kidneys. Cedar chips in a cheesecloth square, or cedar oil in an absorbent cloth will repel moths. The cedar should be 'aromatic cedar', also referred to as juniper in some areas. Cedar chips are available at many craft supply stores, or make your own using a plane and a block of cedar from the lumberyard.

Homemade moth-repelling sachets can also be made with lavender, rosemary, vetiver and rose petals.

Dried lemon peels are also a natural moth deterrent - simply toss into clothes chest, or tie in cheesecloth and hang in the closet.

Oil and Grease Spots: For small spills on the garage floor, add baking soda and scrub with wet brush.

Oven Cleaner: Moisten oven surfaces with sponge and water. Use 3/4cup baking soda, 1/4cup salt and 1/4cup water to make a thick paste, and spread throughout oven interior. (avoid bare metal and any openings) Let sit overnight. Remove with spatula and wipe clean. Rub gently with fine steel wool for tough spots. Or use Arm & Hammer Oven Cleaner, declared nontoxic by Consumers Union.

Paint Brush Cleaner: Non-toxic, citrus oil based solvents are now available commercially under several brand names. Citra-Solve is one brand. This works well for cleaning brushes of oil-based paints. Paint brushes and rollers used for an on-going project can be saved overnight, or even up to a week, without cleaning at all. Simply wrap the brush or roller snugly in a plastic bag, such as a used bread or produce bag. Squeeze out air pockets and store away from light. The paint won't dry because air can't get to it. Simply unwrap the brush or roller the next day and continue with the job.

Fresh paint odors can be reduced by placing a small dish of white vinegar in the room.

Rust Remover: Sprinkle a little salt on the rust, squeeze a lime over the salt until it is well soaked. Leave the mixture on for 2 - 3 hours. Use leftover rind to scrub residue.

Scouring Powder: For top of stove, refrigerator and other such surfaces that should not be scratched, use baking soda. Apply baking soda directly with a damp sponge.

Shoe Polish: Olive oil with a few drops of lemon juice can be applied to shoes with a thick cotton or terry rag. Leave for a few minutes; wipe and buff with a clean, dry rag.

Stickers on walls: Our children covered the inside of their room doors with stickers. Now they are grown, but the stickers remained. To remove, sponge vinegar over them several times, and wait 15 minutes, then rub off the stickers. This also works for price tags (stickers) on tools, etc.

Toilet Bowl Cleaner: Mix 1/4 cup baking soda and 1 cup vinegar, pour into basin and let it set for a few minutes. Scrub with brush and rinse. A mixture of borax (2 parts) and lemon juice (one part) will also work.

Tub and Tile Cleaner: For simple cleaning, rub in baking soda with a damp sponge and rinse with fresh water. For tougher jobs, wipe surfaces with vinegar first and follow with baking soda as a scouring powder. (Vinegar can break down tile grout, so use sparingly.)

Wallpaper Remover: Mix equal parts of white vinegar and hot water, apply with sponge over the old wallpaper to soften the adhesive. Open room windows or use a fan to dissipate the pungent vinegar smell.

Water Rings on Wood: Water rings on a wooden table or counter are the result of moisture that is trapped under the topcoat, but not the finish. Try applying toothpaste or mayonnaise to a damp cloth and rub into the ring. Once the ring is removed, buff the entire wood surface.

Window Cleaner: Mix 2 teaspoons of white vinegar with 1 liter (qt) warm water. Use crumpled newspaper or cotton cloth to clean. Don't clean windows if the sun is on them, or if they are warm, or streaks will show on drying. The All-Purpose Cleaner (above) also works well on windows. Be sure to follow the recipe, because using too strong a solution of vinegar will etch the glass and eventually cloud it.