

## **Reducing the Use of Hazardous Household Products**



**Increasingly we hear how common household products can be toxic to humans, pets, and our ecosystem.** The website Women's Voices for the Earth states that tens of thousands of chemicals are used in American products today, with very little information provided about the potential consequences for human health, and with little oversight by the government. In fact, no legal requirements exist for ingredient labeling on household products, limiting our access to information about chemicals we might wish to avoid. (Winter 2018 note: after several years of hard work, a bill about cleaning product labeling (The Cleaning Product Labeling Act) was introduced in Congress last year. It still seems to be in the Introduction phase. California passed their own "Cleaning Product Right to Know Act" at the end of 2017.)

The average household generates 20 lbs. of hazardous waste per year, much of which is from cleaning supplies ([www.EPA.gov](http://www.EPA.gov)), and it is estimated that the air quality in our homes is 2 - 5 times worse than the air quality of the outdoors (pamphlet from Environmental Health Coalition of Western MA.)

**Fortunately, there is a lot that you can do to detoxify your home. Here are some steps you can take** - even one or two will make a real difference:

- **Educate yourself about this topic.** Do your own research about household toxins and decide which chemicals you want to avoid.
- **Always read labels.** Some say that if you can't pronounce an ingredient, you probably shouldn't buy the product! And **don't buy a product that has little or no information about ingredients.**
- It may seem obvious, but **take note of these words on product labels:** warning, danger, irritant, caution, corrosive, and poison.
- If you do use a product with warnings, **use rubber gloves, ventilate the area, and, if appropriate, dilute the product with water.** To avoid adverse chemical reactions, never use more than one product at a time, and **never mix products.** (Inform yourself about the dangers of mixing any cleaning products, including natural ones, together or in the wrong proportions..)
- **Avoid products with fragrances and dyes.** Ironically a "fresh-smelling" home can be deleterious to your health.
- **Use non-toxic, do-it-yourself versions of household cleaners and other products.** Ingredients for these home-made recipes can include: vinegar, baking-soda, lemon juice, borax, unscented liquid soaps, and essential oils. Make good use of old tooth brushes for scrubbing, coarse sponges, and elbow grease! (See websites below for do-it-yourself non-toxic recipes. As

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I said above, even vinegar and baking soda can cause adverse effects if mixed/stored incorrectly – and vinegar should never be mixed with hydrogen peroxide or bleach.)

- **Seek out companies that restrict themselves to ingredients that are non-toxic, biodegradable and free of petrochemicals.** And look for "**Certified Green**" products - ones approved by programs such as "Green Seal" and "Ecologo."
- **Beware of "green washing"** - attempts to sell products by calling them natural, eco-friendly or green. Always check the ingredients.
- **Support current legislation** that requires companies to disclose ingredients and to replace toxic ones with safer alternatives.

**There are many websites that will give you advice** about reducing the use of hazardous household products, as well as recipes for non-toxic, homemade alternatives. Google the topic, or try one of these:

- [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) (Environmental Working Group)
- [www.healthytomorrow.org](http://www.healthytomorrow.org)
- [www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)
- [www.womensvoices.org](http://www.womensvoices.org)
- [www.healthystuff.org](http://www.healthystuff.org)
- [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)
- [www.toxipedia.com](http://www.toxipedia.com)
- [www.masscosh.org](http://www.masscosh.org) (MA Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health)

**Here is an interesting winning "green tip" from a contest sponsored by [www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com). It demonstrates some non-toxic homemade recipes for household cleaning:**

"A few years ago I needed a healthier way to clean. The smell of harsh commercial cleansers with all their chemicals gave me migraines. I now use baking soda and vinegar for almost all household cleaning. In the laundry, a little vinegar in the rinse cycle instead of fabric softener works wonders and incredibly inexpensive. Mop the floors with a mix of baking soda and vinegar in the water. Use the same mix in the garbage disposal to clean it or use orange peels - they smell wonderful. Clean the showers with baking soda and vinegar. I have saved hundreds of dollars each year by doing this instead of buying all those harsh cleaners. I have saved thousands of dollars in medical costs by going green and not subjecting my body to the chemicals in those cleaners. The peace of mind I get from knowing I am healthier, wealthier and kinder to the environment - that's priceless."