Safer Substitutes for Home Cleaning

Cleaners

- Dishes: Buy vegetable based or citrus-based soaps instead
 of petroleum based. Use non-chlorinated, non-phosphate or
 low-phosphate products. Phosphates contribute arsenic to
 waters which is toxic to marine life.
 - Unless your water is very hard, you should get good results with half of the recommended amount in your dishwasher. Sprinkle a handful of baking soda over the dishes instead of filling the dispenser with detergent.
- Mildew Removal: Scrub mildew spots with a borax/water paste using a nylon scouring pad. For plaster walls, leave the paste on the wall for a couple of days then vacuum off. For less severe problems, try scrubbing the mildew with a vinegar and salt paste.
 - To clean mildew from a shower curtain, use a mixture of ½ cup borax to 1 gallon of water. Alternately, try full strength vinegar, then rinse well. The shower curtain can also be machine washed with a towel; add 1 cup vinegar to the rinse cycle. Mildew Prevention: Always air out damp areas. Keep a squeegee in the shower and encourage its use. Wash grout often enough so mold does not get established. Use ½ cup borax per gallon of hot water, or use a very dilute bleach solution of ¼ cup bleach per gallon of water. Seal grout after
- Toilet Bowl Cleaners: Use a mix of ½ cup borax per 1 gallon of water to clean and deodorize; or use a mixture of baking soda and water sprinkle baking soda around the rim. For severe problems, let 1 cup of borax sit in the bowl overnight. Coat stains in the bowl with a paste of lemon juice and borax; let sit about 20 minutes and scrub.
 Avoid solid toilet bowl deodorizers with paradichlorobenzene (there is evidence that it causes cancer in lab animals). Do

cleaners that contain chlorine (like bleach) as toxic chlorine

not mix cleaners that contain acid (read the label) with

cleaning by painting with a water sealer.

gas is released.

• Tub and Sink Cleaners: Use baking soda as a scouring cleanser or use a non-chlorinated cleaner like Bon Ami (which is very effective and does not dissolve as fast as baking soda). Try fine grain wet/dry sandpaper (400 grit) to remove pot marks in porcelain sinks (this is more gentle than common scouring cleansers). Chlorinated cleansers may still be necessary to remove stubborn stains in porcelain.

Caution: chlorinated cleansers contain bleach which can react with other cleaners that contain ammonia or acids to form dangerous gases.

To remove mineral deposits around faucets, cover deposits with strips of paper towels soaked in vinegar. Let sit for 1 hour and rinse.

- Floor Cleaners: To clean vinyl and linoleum, use ¼ cup white vinegar and ¼ cup washing soda in a gallon of water. Remove scuff marks from linoleum with toothpaste.
 - To clean wood floors, damp mop with mild vegetable oil soap and dry immediately.
 - For painted or varnished wood, mix 1 teaspoon washing soda and 1 gallon hot water; rinse with clear water; dry immediately.
 - For polyurethane sealed floors, use ½ cup white vinegar in 1 gallon water; dry immediately.
- Rug, carpet and upholstery: Vacuum regularly to keep dirt
 from getting ground in. Clean up spills immediately. Pour club
 soda on the spill and blot. Use a non-aerosol, soap-based
 cleaner. Mix 1 quart warm water, 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
 based soap/detergent, 1 teaspoon borax and a splash of
 vinegar; apply with a damp cloth or sponge and rub gently, blot.

- Glass: Use ¼ cup vinegar per 1 quart of water. A quality squeegee is the secret to a streak free window.
- Drain Openers: Put a strainer on all drains. Pour boiling water down the drain once a week to keep it grease free.
 To free a clog: Toss a handful of baking soda + ½ cup of vinegar down the drain. Cover the drain, sealing in the carbon dioxide gas bubbles which will agitate the clog loose. Let sit 15 minutes, then rinse with 2 quarts boiling water and follow with a plunger. Use a metal snake to unclog stubborn drains.
- Oven Cleaning: Mix 2 tablespoons liquid dish soap and 2 teaspoons borax in 2 cups of warm water. Apply and let sit for 20 minutes, then scrub. Alternately, use a non-chlorinated scouring powder, like Bon Ami, or use a baking soda, salt and water paste. Use a razor blade or spatula for tough spots. Avoid aerosol cleaners. Easy-off brand has a non-caustic formula with no lye (sodium hydroxide). Don't use any abrasive cleaning products on self-cleaning ovens. Prevention: periodically clean the oven with baking soda and water. Protect the oven floor from spills using a cookie sheet or foil pan.

Laundry

- Laundry Detergent: Use detergents that do not contain phosphates. Liquid laundry detergents do not contain phosphates. Non-phosphate cleaners have been shown to clean very well (consumer reports, Feb. 1991). Laundry soaps clean better if a water softener like borax, washing soda or baking soda is added to prevent soap scum residue. Products containing washing soda brighten fabrics, cost less than bleach and are safer.
- Bleach: Use a non-chlorine dry bleach or washing soda to whiten clothes. Use hydrogen peroxide-based liquid bleaches. Hydrogen peroxide breaks down to water and oxygen in wastewater.
 - If you must use chlorine bleach, try using half of the recommended amount and add $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup baking soda per load. Don't buy scented bleaches as this makes them attractive to children.
- Fabric Softeners: To freshen and soften natural fiber clothing, add 1 cup vinegar or ¼ cup baking soda during the final rinse. To reduce static cling in synthetics, line dry clothes or remove from dryer when still slightly damp.
 Fabric softener sheets are safer to have in your laundry room than a liquid or aerosol softener (less chance of the product being swallowed or getting into the eyes or lungs accidentally).
- Presoaking: Soak heavily soiled items in warm water with ½ cup of washing soda for 30 minutes.
- Dry cleaning: Remove plastic bags from fresh dry cleaning and air the clothing out before hanging in your closet. This will limit your exposure to perchloroethylene, the solvent used most often in dry cleaning.
 - Hand wash when possible. Ask questions about cleaning options when you buy the clothes or buy clothes that don't require dry cleaning (e.g. washable rayon or silk).

Disinfectants

- Soap and hot water is sufficient for most household needs.
- Keep surfaces dry. Bacteria, viruses, mildew and mold generally cannot live without dampness.
- For occasional disinfecting (e.g. to kill germs on meat cutting board or washing shower stall floor or to prevent mold in damp areas), mix ¼ cup liquid chlorine in a gallon of water.
 The U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services recommends this dilution to disinfecting in health care and dental settings.
- Any container contain bleach should be child proof and well labeled.
- Hydrogen Peroxide (sold in 3% solution) is effective against viruses
- Borax has also been shown to have disinfecting qualities.
 Mix ½ cup in a gallon of water. (note Borax has not been through the EPAs stringent testing that qualifies a material as a disinfectant)
- Disinfecting you toilet may be an exercise in futility. Any household cleaner can be used to clean the toilet, even baking soda.

Air Fresheners and Deodorizers

 Air Fresheners: Address odors directly by cleaning or removing the cause. Open doors and windows, improve ventilation, use a stove fan when cooking. Leave baking soda in open containers in refrigerators, closets and bathrooms.

To scent the air, set out potpourri in open dishes; simmer cinnamon and cloves; burn scented candles.

Most air fresheners either mask the odor or contain chemicals that desensitize your nose. They also contain chemicals that contribute to air pollution. Avoid products that contain paradichlorobenzene (there is evidence that it causes cancer in lab animals).

Deodorizers:

For carpets, sprinkle a mix of baking soda, borax and cornmeal liberally on the carpet. Wait on hour or overnight, then vacuum.

For cat boxes, sprinkle baking soda in the bottom before adding kitty litter.

Sprinkle baking soda in the bottom of garbage cans to inhibit the growth of odor-producing molds and bacteria.

Polishes

 Shoe Polish: For leather, apply olive oil, walnut oil or beeswax, then buff with a chamois cloth. Alternately, rub equal parts of white vinegar and linseed oil into the leather and buff.

To shine and protect patent leather shoes, rub with a dab of petroleum jelly.

To clean dirt marks from suede, rub with an art-gum eraser and buff lightly with sandpaper, emery board or wire suede brush.

Avoid products containing methylene chloride, trichloroethylene (TCE), trichloroethane (TCA), nitrobenzene as these chemicals cause central nervous system problems and liver damage if ingested. If you must use conventional shoe polish, use in a well ventilated area.

• Furniture Polish: Polish unvarnished wood with almond, walnut or olive oil. Work it in well and wipe off excess.

To clean and polish varnished wood, use a mild vegetable oil soap. Use linseed oil to revitalize old furniture.

Wash painted wood with a mix of 1 teaspoon washing soda per gallon of hot water, rinse with clear water.

To remove watermarks from wood furniture, rub toothpaste on the spot and polish with a soft cloth.

Caution: Many furniture polishes contain petroleum distillates which are very dangerous if swallowed.

Metal Polish: Brass: Make a paste of ½ teaspoon salt ,½ cup white vinegar and flour. Apply thickly, let sit 15 min-1/2 hour, rinse thoroughly with water.

Copper: Polish with a paste of lemon juice and salt.

Silver: Boil silver for 3 min. in a quart of water containing 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon salt and a piece of aluminum foil; or rub with toothpaste.

Chrome: Wipe with vinegar, rinse with water and dry (to remove hard water deposits); or shine with baby oil and a soft cloth (to remove soap scum).

Stainless Steel: Clean and polish with baking soda and water paste or a cleanser like Bon Ami.

Spot and Stain Removal

- Avoid products with 1,1,1-trichloroethane (TCA) or naphthalene.
- Blood: Immediately clean with club soda or sponge with cold water. Bleach' with ¼ cup borax in 2 cups cold water; sponge with cold water and rinse. Alternately, saturate with hydrogen peroxide; let sit a couple minutes and wash. Hydrogen peroxide may bleach out color, so test first.
- Chocolate and Coffee: Soak in cold water, rub with soap and a borax solution, rinse, and then launder. If necessary, rub with a borax/water paste.
- Fruit Stains: Soak in cold water for 30 minutes; rub soap into remaining stain, then wash. 'Bleach' with lemon juice and sunlight, if needed, or soak in vinegar.
- Grease: Apply a paste of cornstarch and water. Brush off
 when dry. Alternately, cover the spot with baking soda or
 cornmeal; let sit to absorb the grease then brush off.
 Another solution is to scrub the spot with toothpaste.
 For grease on suede, sponge with a cloth dipped in white
 vinegar, dry and brush off.
- Ink: Ink is tough to get out. Try saturating the stain with milk or sponge the stain with alcohol. Alternately, apply a cream of tartar and lemon juice paste; set for 1 hour.
- Lipstick: Rub with cold cream or shortening to dissolve the color; rinse the area with a solution of washing soda and warm water to remove the grease. Then wash in soapy water.
- **Oil:** Rub white chalk into the stain before laundering or scrub the spot with toothpaste.
- Perspiration Stains: Also tough to remove, but try sponging the stain with a weak solution of white vinegar or lemon juice and water.
- Rust Stains on Clothing: Moisten the spot with lemon juice, sprinkle with salt and leave in the sun for a couple of days.
 Alternately, try a waterless auto mechanic's hand cleaner.
- Tea: Stretch fabric over a basin and pour boiling water over the stain; wash as usual.
- Wine: Blot with paper towels to absorb wine, and then apply either club soda, rubbing alcohol, borax or white wine (!) to blot out the stain. Alternately, stretch over sink and pour boiling water over the stain and rinse with cold water.
- General Stains: Rub with moist baking soda, cornstarch (on porcelain), or salt. For tougher stains, make a paste of 3 tablespoons borax and 1 tablespoon of lemon juice; scrub with a nylon scouring pad and rinse with water.