

Green Cleaning Ideas, Tips and Instructions

This handout started as a series of four articles on Healthy Home Cleaning for my blog. However, here it is together, wrapped up in one nice and easy little package.

Part 1 – Thoughts on Cleaning

When my son was an infant, I had a cleaning lady. It was wonderful! The feeling the house had after she left was unmistakably sparkly and fresh. It was one of the best post-baby treats I can imagine and highly encourage everyone to spend money on cleaning services for baby shower gifts. Yet, as sometimes happens, budgets change. When the baby was about one, we started cleaning our house by ourselves again.

Luckily, I had recently gone through Denise Linn's 28 day Soul Coaching program with the book and her guided meditations available free on her website. While many things changed in my life during this process, I also started to think about cleaning in a new way.

Prior to this, I could vacuum, dust, and straighten all day, but I just hated cleaning my bathrooms. Throughout our ten years of marriage, my husband had been my rock star serving as our designated bathroom cleaner because I hated it that much. Yet, after my enlightenment, so to speak, I started thinking about a clean bathroom as a present to myself. I remembered how great it felt to be home after our cleaning person left, and decided I wanted to feel that way again. I also started researching making my own environmentally friendly cleaning products, so it became a bit of a challenge and science experiment at the same time. Pretty much, I just decided to own it. Having a clean house was going to be my gift to myself.

Now, I really like it. I play music. I dance. I improve my family's health. I help the environment. The bathroom doesn't bother me at all anymore. Go figure.

AND... there's more! Cleaning has the power to activate intention. If your are feeling tired and grouchy...come up with an intention like "I want to be vibrant and full of life." Then, clean your windows, and say, "I clean these windows to let vibrant energy into my home and fill me with life." Every time you see those clean windows, you will remember your intention and it will re-enforce your desired change. Easy! Recruit these chores to serve your highest good – I say!

Do I have you convinced? Want to learn more? Stay tuned – more coming. However, if in the mean time you want to start leaning more, good places to start are:

1. Denise Linn's "Soul Coaching"
2. Karen Logan's "Clean House, Clean Planet"
3. Google phrases like "Natural Bathroom Cleaner" or "Make my own tub scrub."

Happy Cleaning!

Part 2 – The Bathroom

I used to hate cleaning the bathrooms, but now I think of this as giving myself a present. Cleaning my bathrooms with my personal, homemade products gives me a great feeling

of helping my home's air quality, my family's health, and the environment. Plus, doing it to a hot, Latin rhythm is fun!

There are a ton of resources out there regarding making your own cleaning products. I have simply decided to share what works for me. I encourage you to research and come up with even better solutions. Please share them with me too – I love to hear about cool things like this.

Make your own all-purpose, biodegradable, environmentally and budget friendly bathroom cleaner.

1. Procure one clean, empty spray bottle – best to spend \$0.80 and get a new one.
2. Fill half full with vinegar.
3. Fill almost to top with water.
4. Optional – Add 20-30 drops of your favorite essential oil. I like to rotate with Lemon and Peppermint – but it's a personal preference here.
5. Shake Well

Here is my typical bathroom cleaning routine. It takes about eight minutes.

1. Play Latin Dance Music...very important.
2. Spray vinegar mixture all over tub/shower.
3. Spray outside and inside of toilet.
4. Spray mirror, sink and countertop.
5. Wipe mirror with soft cotton rag. (If you have used any glass cleaner on your mirror before...it will get streaky when you wipe with the vinegar mix. Just continue spraying and wiping several times and that will go away and you will have sparkly, clean mirrors. You will not need to do this again as long as you stay away from commercial glass cleaners.)
6. Scrub sink with nylon scrubber...rinse.
7. Wipe counter with same soft cotton rag. I like to use old cloth diapers.
8. Scrub tub/shower with nylon scrubber. Rinse. Wipe edges with same cloth.
9. Wipe outside of toilet, under the lid, top of the seat, and under the seat..in that order. Throw rag into laundry...it is done.
10. Scrub inside of toilet with toilet brush. Flush.
11. You are probably done now. Dance. Sometimes the throne needs a little more...shall we say...love. In that case, I reach for my Ecover toilet bowl cleaner. It is a little more expensive than Lysol or Clorox- but not too much. I pay \$4.70 for 25 ounces at my health food store. Since I do not use it very much and it is so much better for the environment, this product fits well into my chemical free, budget minded home. (I do not receive anything from Ecover for promoting them – and I encourage experimentation freely. I use it because I like how it works.)

A footnote about vinegar: I was really excited the first time I used vinegar to clean my whole bathroom. I could not believe how well it worked and how cheap it was at my local grocery store. Unfortunately, I found out that the big jugs of vinegar for \$1.47 or so may be made out of petroleum. Can you believe that? Apparently, you can make anything out of oil. So, being of sound, healthy home, and renewable resources mind...I switched to Heinz. It is about \$1.47 for about half as much, but is derived from corn. Plus, even half as much usually lasts me about six weeks or so. So \$1.47 isn't so bad

for that much cleaning. There is a \$7 bottle of vinegar at my health food store that is probably much better – but I'm sticking with Heinz for now.

Part 3 – The Kitchen

My family and I sure spend a lot of time in our kitchen. I feel lucky to have my own kitchen sitting in the Family & Foundation and Abundance areas of the home. I love to prepare and share good food with my family. I suggest trying to keep this area free from clutter when possible, especially because of how much time we spend in the kitchen, and how great it feels when it is clear and clean.

I have to be honest and tell you this room is where I use the most commercial products. While I would like to use all homemade cleaners, I have run into difficulty finding ones that work well here. Yet, I do have some good tips.

1. Surface Cleaner – Mrs. Meyers All Purpose Concentrated Cleaner. I bought one of these sometime last year, and I haven't even gone through a fifth of it. I take one capful of cleaner to 16 oz of water – and I am set for several weeks of cleaning up counters, tables and highchairs.
2. Dishwasher – Ecover or BioKleen Dishwashing Detergent. Also – substitute white vinegar in your rinse aid compartment – works great – no chemicals.
3. Liquid Dish Soap – Mrs. Meyers again. It just works so well and I can clean an entire sink full of dishes with one squirt. I have also had good luck with Seventh Generation Dish Soap – it requires more - but is a bit cheaper.
4. Stainless Steel Appliances – Mrs. Meyers Stainless Steel Cleaner. This is more like a polish, but it works very well. I only have to use it once a month or so – and my stainless steel appliances and compost bucket look great!
5. Floor Cleaner – I use water. Unless it is raw chicken on the floor where I would feel the need to use some disinfectant, I use a damp microfiber mop. It works great!
6. Other cool tricks – Salt and Lemon Juice Paste for rust stains. Combine into pastes – leave on rust overnight – wipe off in morning. No need for CLR at all.

Part 4 – The Rest of the House & Laundry

I spend most of my cleaning energy on the bathrooms and kitchen. Sometimes, I feel the rest of the house must feel neglected – like the proverbial middle child. So, I have recently been expressing my gratitude to my living room and bedrooms for not needing so much attention. Luckily, this lack of dirt lends itself well to chemical-free cleaning. Basic vacuuming is a must – but contains no chemicals that I know of. Hooray! I do have a few tips for healthier cleaning and hope you find them helpful.

1. Use a microfiber cloth or glove to dust the furniture, window sills, ceiling fan blades, etc. My addiction to dusting spray was easily overcome by these cloths – they work great.
2. Use homemade all-purpose bathroom cleaner (See Part 2) to clean windows.
3. For spots on carpet and furniture – try a damp cloth first. I know this seems strange, but I have a really old dog and a really crazy two-year-old, and I have

- not had a stain on a carpet or furniture that a damp cloth has not taken care of. Sometimes I have to address it two or three times – but I have to say – it has always come out. I just pretend that I have carpet cleaner on my rag – even though it is water – and work in circles. Let dry and repeat. I have heard, that for very tricky stains, baking soda and a spray of vinegar will work well, but I am sticking with water for now. (Note – of course this will not work for Sharpie marks and such – but I doubt many harsh chemical cleaners would take that out either)
4. Switch to rags and cloth napkins. I have not bought any paper towels or paper napkins in two years – and it's really no big deal. It was an easy switch, and now every single time we sit down for dinner or breakfast – the cloth napkins make it a little bit fancy. I throw the dirty napkins in with my jeans and laundry once a week.
 5. Throw all your air fresheners away! This is easy and important – they are a big source of chemicals in the home. Use essential oils for fragrance instead. If you, like me, do not have a lot of the essential oil supplies or time to dedicate to this study, just find some of the pre-mixed sprays that you like. I have several from my local aroma therapist that are lovely. These are usually a little more expensive than a Glade Plug-In, but last at least five times as long.
 6. Think about alternatives for pest control. We, like most folks, have spiders in our basement. I know that spiders are an integral part of the web of life and all – but I really want them to live outside. So, I was thinking creatively and did some research via google and found that osage oranges (which just happen to grow locally around the corner) work wonders for getting rid of spiders. I have also read things about citrus oil and walnut branches working well too.

Laundry

1. Switch to chemical free laundry products. I have used Method, Ecover and Mrs. Meyers products and have still had lovely, fresh smelling clean clothes.
2. If cost is an issue, supplement laundry with Borax. I add ½ cup of borax (for a large load) to the washer as it is filling, and then add ½ as much laundry detergent as the instructions direct. This works great and saves \$\$ - and the clothes seems extra bright and fresh to me. For small loads – proportion down.
3. To kill mold on the shower curtain – add ½ cup of Borax to the washer on the soak setting. Let the shower curtain soak for 30 minute to an hour. Switch to the regular wash cycle, add Borax and detergent combo and let it go. This has worked for me much better than regular bleach used to.
4. Limit the use of the dryer when possible. Did you know that Energy Star does not give ratings for dryers because they are so inefficient? I have not made the leap to a laundry line yet – but I plan to soon, and encourage you to do so if you can. If not, go ahead and think creatively about when to use the dryer. You can combine small loads, and dry things like rags on a drying rack. Give yourself a pat on the back, or a fair-trade latte, when you are able to reduce your dryer's usage.

In conclusion, the best thing to do is to think before reaching for household chemicals. Do some research and try some different things. You can make a huge difference in your household air quality by being creative and choosing to be chemical-free.