

# GREEN CLEANING

## The Basic Ten

Stock your cupboards with these ten products, and you can clean just about anything:

1. **White vinegar:** An antifungal that also kills germs and bacteria.
2. **Baking soda:** Eliminates odors and works as a gentle scouring powder.
3. **Borax:** this is the common name for the natural mineral compound sodium borate, eliminates odors, removes dirt, and acts as an antifungal and possible disinfectant. Use with care around children and pets, as it can be toxic if swallowed.
4. **Hydrogen peroxide** (3% concentration): A great nontoxic bleach and stain remover, as well as a proven disinfectant.
5. **Club soda** (fresh): A stain remover and polisher.
6. **Lemon juice:** A pleasant-smelling nontoxic bleach, grease-cutter, and stain remover.
7. **Liquid castile soap:** An all-purpose cleaner, grease-cutter, and disinfectant. “Castile” means the soap is vegetable-based, not animal-fat-based.
8. **Corn meal:** Great at absorbing carpet spills.
9. **Olive oil:** Makes a wonderful furniture polish.
10. **Pure essential oils:** Adding all-natural, organic essential oils to your cleaning concoctions can add wonderful scents to your housekeeping endeavors. Some—such as lavender, peppermint, eucalyptus, lemongrass, and tea tree oils—also may have antibacterial, anti-fungal, or insect-repelling properties. To find pure, organic essential oils, visit your local health food store or search ["essential oils" in our \*National Green Pages\*](#). Remember to use care with essential oils, as they can cause harmful reactions



when ingested or put directly on the skin. Some are considered dangerous for pregnant women. If you're unsure about an oil, [consult a reliable source on its proper usage](#).

## The Basic Ten at Work

Now that you know what products you need, grab a few clean, empty spray bottles; some rags and sponges; and a bucket of water, and you're ready to clean your house the green way.

- **All-purpose cleaners:** An all-purpose cleaner is just that—something you can use for just about every surface. Home Enlightenment author Annie B. Bond offers this recipe for an all-purpose spray cleaner: Put ½ tsp. washing soda and a dab of liquid soap (castile soap works) into a spray bottle with 2 cups very hot tap water. Shake to dissolve. The spray will keep indefinitely. For an even simpler solution, try cleaning with two cups of club soda in a spray bottle.
- **Hard floor cleaner:** [Author and Care2.com healthy living editor Annie B. Bond](#) recommends this solution for all hard floors (except when directed by the manufacturer to avoid even mild detergents): Combine 1/4 liquid castile soap, up to 1/2 cup white vinegar or lemon juice, and 2 gallons of warm water in a large plastic bucket. Use with a mop or sponge.
- **Carpet cleaner:** To clean and disinfect your carpet, try blending 1/2 cup baking soda, 1 cup borax, and 1 cup cornmeal. Sprinkle mixture over rug and rub with a cloth. Be sure to sprinkle, rather than dump, the mixture on your carpet. Large clumps of cornmeal could clog your vacuum. Let rest for several hours or overnight, then vacuum. To remove stains from your carpet, Logan advises mixing 1/4 cup liquid castile soap and 1/3 cup water in a blender until foamy. Spread the mixture on the carpet and let sit for a few minutes, then scrub the stain with a brush or clean rag. Also, club soda will remove many acidic stains, like coffee, wine, or juice. To deal with big carpet spills, pour cornmeal on the spill, wait 15 minutes, then vacuum.



- **Glass cleaner:** To make your windows shine, you can simply use club soda in a spray bottle. Add 1 tsp. of lemon juice to increase your window cleaner's degreasing power. Logan recommends using a terry-cloth cotton rag for best results.
- **Bathroom surface cleaners:** You can use the all-purpose cleaners recommended above or, for even simpler bathroom cleaning, use baking soda or borax as a scouring powder. For a softer scrub, Bond says to combine 1/2 cup baking soda with enough liquid soap to achieve a frosting-like consistency. You may want to add 5-10 drops of an essential oil for fragrance. Club soda works wonders on plumbing fixtures.
- **Toilet cleaner:** Sprinkle baking soda or borax, or pour white vinegar into the toilet, and let sit for a few minutes. Scrub with a good toilet brush.
- **Oven cleaner:** Cover the oven floor with baking soda, spray with water until very damp, and let set overnight. Spray with water every few hours before you go to bed to keep damp. In the morning, clean out the baking soda, and the stuck-on gunk will be loosened and ready to scrub off.
- **Mold remover:** Bond recommends combining 1/2 cup hydrogen peroxide or white vinegar with 1 cup water. Spray on mold and do not rinse. She also recommends treating mold with a spray mixture of 2 tsp. tea tree oil and 2 cups water.
- **Wood polish:** To polish wood furniture, dab olive oil onto a soft cloth and rub.

## The Germ Concern

You may be worried about do-it-yourself green cleaners not being able to kill germs effectively. Researchers at Tufts New England Medical Center, on the other hand, worry that we're killing too many microorganisms, saying that disinfectants found in household cleaners may contribute to drug resistant bacteria. Healthy Child Healthy World says that ordinary soap and water do the job well enough to keep our families safe, barring someone with a seriously compromised immune system.



For most of us, the best way to prevent the spread of harmful microorganisms is to wash our hands frequently. Also, disinfect any sponges you're using weekly by boiling them in water for three minutes and then microwaving them for a minute or two. Launder dish rags every week.

If you prefer over-the-counter products, look for green cleaners made with natural ingredients. Check your local health food store, or consult the box below for screened green cleaning product companies listed in our *National Green Pages*<sup>™</sup>.