

Spring Cleaning Goes Green

By Laura Hampton



Long associated with rebirth, renewal and regrowth, spring is the perfect time to clear the cobwebs and start fresh. When the days lengthen and the trees start budding, many on the First Coast open the windows, put on some good music and get busy mopping, scrubbing and dusting away the winter blahs.

Although cleaning products are essential to effective spring cleaning, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, some everyday cleaning supplies contain chemicals associated with eye, skin and respiratory irritation, in addition to other health problems, for humans and animals. Since hazardous chemicals included in cleaning supplies are washed down the drain and out into natural water supplies, they can have a toxic effect on aquatic animals and other wildlife species.

Although there are many "green" cleaning products in stores today, why not use the household items your grandma used? They're safe, natural and inexpensive.

Here are three household items that can turn your spring cleaning into green cleaning:

Vinegar

Made from fermented corn, white distilled vinegar effectively kills most mold, bacteria and germs. Use undiluted to clean grime off refrigerators, fireplaces and glass oven doors; to remove mineral deposits from coffee makers; and to remove calcium deposits on faucets. Mix with baking soda to clean and deodorize a drain, to clean woodwork and walls, or to remove stains from plastic, fiberglass and aluminum sports equipment. Combine with water to clean the microwave, refrigerator shelves and aluminum pots.

Bonus: To polish brass and copper, mix 2 tablespoons of ketchup with 1 tablespoon of white distilled vinegar. Rub on with a clean cloth until dry and shiny.

Lemons

Highly acidic, lemons are a strong cleaning and deodorizing agent with multiple uses. For an air freshener, ground a slice of lemon up in the garbage disposal. To disinfect, rub a slice of lemon across a chopping block, or for stain removal, leave lemon juice on a stained chopping block for 10 minutes. To eliminate mold and mildew from any surface, apply full-strength lemon juice to a sponge and wipe the area. To clean and polish unvarnished wood, mix 2 teaspoons each of vegetable oil and lemon juice, run along the surface with a clean, dry cloth. To remove rust, sprinkle table salt liberally over the rust stain and squeeze lemon juice over it; let sit for several hours to draw the stain out. To clean stains off Formica counter tops, squeeze lemon juice on the stain and let soak for 30 minutes, sprinkle baking soda on top and scrub with a soft washcloth.

Baking Soda

Non-toxic, cheap and readily available, baking soda can be used to clean in almost every room of the house. Place baking

soda on a wet sponge to use as a gentle non-abrasive cleanser for kitchen counter tops, sinks, bathtubs, ovens and fiberglass. Add baking soda to a load of laundry to eliminate odors, or pre-treat laundry stains with a paste made with baking soda and water. Mild and effective, baking soda can be used to safely clean hair brushes, children's toys and lawn furniture.

For every dusting, mopping, polishing and scrubbing project in your spring cleaning ritual, there's a natural product already in your kitchen to handle the job. Use these household remedies to clean away the old and welcome a fresh new season.

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