

# Alternative Household Cleaners

---

## Keeping your septic system healthy and happy

Everyone enjoys having a fresh clean house, but not everyone realizes that modern household cleaners often contain toxic materials that can pose health or environmental hazards if used or disposed of improperly.

According to national estimates, each home contains 3-8 gallons of hazardous materials in kitchens, bathrooms garages and basements. Throwing these materials down the drain can cause them to leach into the soil and pollute ground and surface waters. One graphic example of the kind of impact these materials can produce is that as little as one pint of solvent can cause measurable fish kills.

Safer alternatives exist to those cleaners that contain toxic materials. As an added benefit, these are often less expensive! Here is a sampling of some basic cleaners to try in all parts of the house.

---

## A sample of recipes for alternative cleaners

**Drain openers/cleaners:** Pour boiling water down your drain twice weekly to prevent clogs. Use a metal snake or plunger to clear a clogged drain.

**Scouring powders:** mix 1/2 cup baking soda with 1/4 cup borax, Bon Ami cleanser, or salt.

**Tub and tile cleaner:** Borax and water. For blackened grout: white vinegar applied with a toothbrush. For rust stains: apply a paste of equal parts hydrogen peroxide and cream of tartar, let sit 15 minutes and rinse. Minimize scum buildup by using a squeegee on the shower stall walls after bathing.

**Bleach:** Borax or washing soda.

**Window cleaner:** 2 tsp. vinegar to 1 quart water.

**Chrome polish:** Use baking soda or vinegar or lemon juice and a soft cloth. Try removing scum with baby oil.

**Copper polish:** Use lemon juice and salt.

**Silver polish:** 1 tablespoon salt, 1 tablespoon baking soda, a few sheets of aluminum foil. Fill a pan big enough to hold the silver with water. Add the silver, baking soda, salt and aluminum foil. Let the mixture sit for an hour or so. (You may notice a slightly rotten egg smell.) Rinse the silver in hot water and polish dry with a soft cloth. (Keep stored silver from tarnishing by wrapping it tightly in plastic after use.) For small pieces, use white toothpaste and your fingertips.

**All purpose floor cleaner:** Mix together 1/8 cup vegetable-oil-based liquid soap, 1/2 cup vinegar, 2 gallons warm water and wash as usual.

**Air fresheners:** Ventilate. Set vinegar out in an open dish. Use opened box of baking soda in small enclosed areas. Add cloves and cinnamon to boiling water and let simmer.

**Microwave cleaner:** Boil a bowl of water in the microwave and let the steam loosen the grime. Wipe clean. Or make a paste with baking soda and water and use a sponge to wash the interior and around the door. Rinse thoroughly.

**Insect spray:** Soak 1 cigarette in 1 quart of water overnight. Strain and spray. Mix dishwashing soap in water and spray.

**Wood furniture dusting and cleaning cloth:** Mix 1/2 teaspoon olive oil, 1/4 cup vinegar or lemon juice in a bowl. Dampen a soft rag with the solution and dust or polish wooden furniture. This rag can be reused several times.

---

*This sampling of recipes came from "Clean & Green: The Complete Guide to Nontoxic and Environmentally Safe Housekeeping," by Annie Berthold-Bond and the brochure, "Hazardous Household Products Equal Hazardous Waste," produced by the City of Boston.*