

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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## Keeping It Clean: Less-Toxic Cleansers for a Healthier Home

**Dear EcoGirl:** I'm concerned about the toxics in mainstream cleansers. Are there less-toxic alternatives that can do the job but aren't too expensive? *Signed, Curious in Occidental*

**Dear Curious:** You're right to be concerned. Many common household cleaners do contain toxics, including ammonia and chlorine, which can cause health problems for your family and pets, both through daily use and accidental poisonings. Some of the warning labels are downright scary!

**Luckily, you can keep your house clean and healthy using less-toxic materials.** In fact, you can do most of your cleaning with just **vinegar, liquid soap, baking soda, and Bon Ami powder.** Doesn't that make your supply cabinet lighter! Using these ingredients also reduces packaging waste, keeps your home smelling great — and, yes, saves you money.

**For instance, you can:**

- **Clean your bathroom and kitchen surfaces** by combining a natural biodegradable liquid soap with water in a spray container. Shake, then clean as usual with a sponge or cloth. For more disinfecting power, add some vinegar to the mix. For more scrubbing action, shake baking soda or Bon Ami onto your sponge. You can also use Bon Ami powder separately to clean porcelain, avoiding the chlorine found in other powder brands.

- **Wash your windows and mirrors** by mixing 1/4 cup vinegar, 2 cups

of water, and 1/2 teaspoon of liquid soap in a spray bottle. Shake, spray, then dry with a towel or (recycled) paper towel. The soap helps it dry a bit faster and better.

- **Deodorize your carpets** by scattering baking soda, waiting an hour, then vacuuming.

- **Clean your drain** by pouring in 1/2 cup baking soda then 3 cups boiling water. For more of a "kick," pour in 1/2 cup baking soda, 1/2 cup vinegar, then cover the drain. This creates a mini-explosion — a fun science experiment for kids of any age. After 15 minutes, rinse with hot water.

- **Bring a beautiful scent to any homemade cleanser** by adding a few drops of a natural essential oil, such as lavender, peppermint, lemon, or eucalyptus. You'll enjoy cleaning more, and leave a healthy aroma as you go.

There are an amazing number of cleaning solutions using simple, inexpensive ingredients. We'll continue covering them in future columns, so please send us your questions and success stories!

**Note: When buying liquid soap and other "green" cleaning products at the store, be sure to read the labels carefully,** especially if you're not at a health food store. Many wonderful less-toxic and environmentally-safe products are available, but some companies are jumping on the bandwagon with vague or exaggerated claims. If a product call itself "green," does the label describe

what specifically makes it so? Just adding an herb or two isn't enough. Does the label list the product's ingredients? The truly healthy ones will. Also consider if any warning statements suggest that there are harmful ingredients inside.

Through these easy steps, you can create a healthier home — and world.

*Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guide to Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino Counties, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter, which gently educates readers about toxics and alternatives.*

*Have questions about going green? Email them to <ecogirl@healthyworld.org> with "EcoGirl" in the subject line. We'll let you know if we cover your topic in future columns. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.*

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