

Janey's Green spring clean...

How about trying old style back to the fifties cleaning? well that SO appeals to me, not because I'm a sucker for punishment and I want to be on my hands and knees like a 1950's housewife scrubbing floors, but because there's something intrinsically satisfying about cleaning your windows with vinegar and newspaper and your kitchen sink with what's left over of the lemon that you made your salad dressing from and knowing that your house is clean – naturally clean, but you and you kids are also healthy, not fumigated from the toxic chemical mix and you are also not contributing to further depletion of the precious planet.



Stocking up

Its worth stocking up on some natural basics such as tea tree oil – you can buy large bottles from www.essentiallyoils.com

Bicarbonate of soda can't be heralded enough. Buy a big box and use it to make a paste with water to clean most surfaces, it will polish chrome, clean vacuum flasks, neutralise odours, freshen carpets before vacuuming, remove stains from teapots and can even be used as a natural toothpaste.



Regular table salt makes a great abrasive scouring powder if needed too.

White distilled vinegar has many uses from descaling kettles to cleaning loos.

Always hang on to lemons as already mentioned, even when thoroughly used up you can pop it into the cutlery drawer of the dishwasher to add a bit of extra sparkle.

A used grapefruit also makes a good 'scrubbing mitt' if you add some salt to really attack the grime Regular household salt is great

Start with the cloths

Oh the joys of microfibre cloths, available now in your regular £1 shop. I bought the original and best the 'e-cloth' and it's brilliant. It's a general purpose cloth made of millions of tiny fibres that will absorb the grease and the dirt. You can use it dry to polish furniture but mostly I use it with a drop of tea tree oil and nothing else to clean surfaces, the loo, bath, whatever. They reckon it can be washed up to 300 times and it requires no cleaning product. Seems incredible doesn't it? I now make sure I've got lots of them and use them for just about everything.

www.e-cloth.com



I like Enjo products too, they have several distributors who may put you off with their zealous passion (its not normal to that thrilled about cleaning is it ?) but there's no doubt their range is unique. I use their 'mitt' made from super absorbent microfibres, and a pretty cool telescopic mop (pictured above), which cleans a really dirty wood floor with just water. I don't know how but it works. After years of throwing out hopeless mops I feel quite liberated (see it is getting me – I admit it – I'm going bonkers!)

www.enjo.net

You can also get a 'universal cleaning block' which is an ingenious way of cleaning without chemicals – its basically a tough foam block with an abrasive effect that can be run under water and then rubbed against metal, wood, glass and ceramics, Only about £2.95 from www.naturalcollection.com



Must Have's

Bi-carbonate of soda is something I now buy in bulk, I've used it since my student days to soak up smells, even after decorating. You can get it in most chemists or from www.dri-pak.co.uk

General Cleaning

To clean the kitchen surfaces half fill the sink with hot water and half a cup full of bi-carb, grab an e-cloth and get to work. Sometimes I just drop a couple of drops of neat tea tree essential oil onto the surface or onto the Enjo mitt and clean up that way.

If I'm cleaning the loo seat I always use neat tea tree oil and wipe with an e cloth which goes straight into the washing machine (even imperfect old me is a bit fanatical where toilets and germ harbouring cloths are involved!!)

For the bathroom, if the bath is very grubby I use the Neem household and bathroom cleaner containing neem and citrus from www.junglesale.com (neem is fantastically antibacterial) The Budge bathroom cleaner from www.livingclean.co.uk is excellent

Bathroom cleaner recipe

To make your own bathroom cleaner simply reclaim an old washing up bottle and refill with
3 cups of bicarbonate of soda
2 cups filtered water
4 tablespoons white vinegar or
1 or 2 drops of essential oil (tea tree or eucalyptus work well)

You can also add a cup of liquid soap.

For the ceramic sink I find nothing makes it sparkle like a squeeze of old lemon!



Dishwasher Detergent

To make your own dishwasher detergent, you'll need citric acid – found in most pharmacies. Mix about a quarter of a cup with a quarter of a cup of household salt, 1 cup of bicarbonate of

soda and 1 cup of borax, add a little water so that its gloopy but not runny and about 5-10 drops of eucalyptus or lemon oil. Store it in a sealed container and you'll need about 2 tablespoons.

Pop a bit of lemon rind in the cutlery tray to give everything a sparkle and always use white vinegar as a rinse aid.

If you've run out of dishwasher detergent and don't have time to make any simply sprinkle bi-carbonate of soda over the dirty dishes, it does a reasonable job !

Polish

Avoid regular furniture polish, it contains highly toxic chemicals. Look to www.auro.co.uk for natural alternatives or use natural beeswax for wood.

You can make your own furniture polish too by mixing olive oil with white vinegar, 3 parts vinegar to one part oil.

Loos

I know what you're shouting at the page – but what do you actually get down the loo with, when it's really stained? well I can't pretend that's an easy one, I find the whole idea of loo brushes faintly disgusting, like when are *they* ever cleaned? I use the 'leave in' powder cleanser from Naturo home, put on some rubber gloves, look the other way and get down there with a scrubbing brush followed by my loos very own Enjo cleaning mitt and some tea tree oil. When I come up for air at least the room smells 'clean' with the antiseptic whiff of the tea tree and then all I need to address is if there's extensive staining around the pan – What a horrible topic !!!



Everyone has heard of pouring Cola down the loo, it's meant to work a treat to clear the stains from the pan but I must admit it hasn't really worked for me. (Don't get me wrong I'm not suggesting you DRINK it either!!) Dental tablets (designed for false teeth) are also meant to clear stains and they do seem to work better but who knows what's in those!! (Hardly chemical free or environmentally friendly I fear!)

Loo cleaning recipes

Make a simple loo cleaner with plant based washing up liquid mixed with bicarbonate of soda, water and white vinegar. but its elbow grease and regular cleaning that's the key. Make your own 'fizzing solution' with 2 tablespoons each of citric acid and bicarbonate of soda, for really stubborn stains.

You can also use a cup of household borax, brush it around and leave it overnight. True loo cleaning purists may recommend that if the bowl is very stained you may need to remove some of the water before you get down there with the brush, in that case I can only suggest rubber gloves, a narrow jug and a hearty spirit!

For more eco 'commercial options' there's Ecover, Bio D, Living Clean and lots more eco options. You can also buy chlorine free toilet bleach. Try an oxygen bleach cleanser is based on simple minerals and naturally derived biodegradable surfactants. They say it's safer for rivers streams and septic tank systems too. See www.naturo-home.co.uk

Drains

It's undoubtedly not a pleasant job but we're encouraged to regularly clean the drains so rather than caustic soda opt for a natural way of maintaining and unblocking the drains. Flush them out regularly with soda crystals hot water and white vinegar. Earth Enzymes make a drain blocker that's safe for septic tanks.



Ovens

For cleaning the cooker an absorbent microfibre cloth or mitt and perhaps a bit of bi-carb really is all you'll need. I'm talking the hob really, no-one cleans inside their cooker that often do they?? I'd avoid regular commercial oven cleaners – the last time I tried one about 15 years ago I couldn't cook a meal for weeks because the chemical whiff penetrated everything.

The vitreous Enamel Association recommend Astonish who according to the blurb make incredibly versatile cleaning Pastes that are suitable for the really dirty jobs and will cut through grime, grease and tough stains inside the oven and on the hob. Its contains no animal products, is non-acidic, non caustic, with no fumes and is biodegradable.

www.astonish.co.uk



For hardy general cleaning, I like Pierre d'argent, a natural eco friendly 'paste' of 100 per cent natural biodegradable elements including soap flakes, vegetable fat, glycerine and scented oil, Excellent for use on cookers, stainless steel, brass, leather, tiles and grouting, and generally awkward stuff.

www.lemonburst.co.uk

Its always a good idea to loosen off the grime in the oven by leaving a big pan of hot water and bi-carb in there on a low heat, it will soak up some of the smells and the steam should loosen some of the grease.

Bicarbonate of soda can be spread liberally inside a fairly grimy oven – dampened with water (use a spray bottle) and left overnight. In the morning you'll need a couple of cloths to remove the gunk and wipe down the white residue but it beats your roast dinner smelling of scary chemicals fumes any day. Similarly you can simmer a pan of cola on the hob to loosen the gunk in the pan. Very odd whiff that one! I've also heard that boiling cinnamon is good, more for the Christmassy aroma!



Glass Mirrors

Back to old style again where newspaper and vinegar really do work a treat but for eco commercial options Natural House www.natural-house.co.uk make a certified organic window spa

Plastic

Bicarbonate of soda will clean most plastics. It's especially good for baby bottles (though I'd highly recommend switching to glass)

Silver

I can't pretend I own much, if any silverware but I have it on good authority that tomato sauce will shine it up a treat. The professionals apparently use a metal sheet to clean silverware and its domestic version is called 'Silverstar' You place the sheet of metal in your sink – cover with salt and boiling water and the silverware that needs cleaning – it can be used over and over and requires no chemicals.

Make your own silver cleaning paste made from bicarbonate of soda and dishwasher liquid (eco friendly of course) to polish up chrome.



Electrical stuff

For cleaning clocks, cameras computers, TV's and all electrical items your best bet is a dry micro fibre cloth or soft small brush, usually its just a case of regularly getting rid of the build up of dust. Ionisers will help too and remember if you have quartz crystals to wash them regularly (see chapter on electro pollution.)



What to buy

Opt for products that claim they are non toxic and are made with Plant and natural mineral ingredients, with no phosphates, chlorine or optical brighteners Also look for ones that say 'Not tested on animals' and do not contain 'Parfum' or any synthetic fragrances. It's also good to look for products that state they are biodegradable and come in recyclable packaging. Some of my favourite ethical companies for household cleaning products are

www.Naturalclean.co.uk

www.biodegradable.biz

www.clearspring.co.uk

www.naturo-home.co.uk

www.livingclean.co.uk

Remember too that many jobs can be done simply with hot water, and maybe the help of a microfibre cloth.

Steam cleaner

If you have access to a steam cleaner – you can pick them up for about £50 possibly less or on freecycle, you've got an instant quick way to clean just about all surfaces, walls – furniture, even carpets. Obviously the steam loosens the dirt though so you'll need to mop it up afterwards! The small ones are fine so long as you're happy to keep refilling with water. If you're doing a serious spring clean consider hiring an industrial one for the day or ask around your neighbours to see if they've one you can borrow.



Smell busting

Most standard air fresheners contain CFC's and all manner chemicals said to increase respiratory problems and headaches. It's ridiculously easy to go another route. For starters open a window and neutralise any smells such as paint or cigarette smoke by leaving a little bowl or carton containing bi-carbonate of soda around. It's great at neutralising odours.

If you like to 'spritz' buy a plant spray, fill it with water and a couple of drops of essential oil – that's it!! too simple yes, if you like a fresh 'antiseptic kind of whiff use tea tree oil – antibacterial and anti-inflammatory, or you can use citronella for a lemony zing or lavender for a relaxing spritz. Sometimes it feels nice just to walk around 'spraying' so do that at your hearts content without damaging your nasal passages with chemicals or the ozone layer with the CFC's from your aerosol can.

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