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Creating Healthier Homes

by Judy Otto

Did you know that there are inexpensive and healthy ways to keep your home clean using only white vinegar, baking soda, and borax, each mixed with water? Many people use chlorine bleach for disinfecting, but bleach produces chlorine gas, a pulmonary irritant that can cause acute damage in the upper and lower respiratory tracts. Bleach alternatives, such as white vinegar mixed one part to one in water in a spray bottle, kills bacteria, viruses and fungus on countertops, woodwork, floors, chrome, and stainless steel. For microwave cleaning, put the mix in a microwave-safe container and bring to a boil in the microwave to remove odors and loosen splattered food. To clean sponges, soak them overnight in a bowl of the vinegar and water mixture.

Use white vinegar full strength for some other cleaning chores: in an empty dishwasher's soap dispenser for a full cycle once per month, two cups in the toilet bowl for a couple of hours before scrubbing with a toilet brush. For hardwood and linoleum floors, use one-half cup of vinegar to one gallon of warm water. Avoid vinegar on stone and marble surfaces, however. A lighter vinegar solution, one cup of water, one tablespoon of vinegar and one teaspoon of baking soda in a spray bottle makes a safe air freshener. The vinegar smell disappears quickly. To remove soap scum and sanitize the bathtub, dip a sponge in a solution of vinegar and baking soda then wipe down your bathtub. Rinse well with clean water. For general cleaning, mix together one-quart warm water, one-teaspoon liquid soap, one-teaspoon borax and one-quarter cup white vinegar. The solution also dissolves greasy dirt.

Borax, also known as sodium borate or sodium tetraborate, occurs naturally and is mined in the U.S., Chile, and Tibet. The mining of borax production isn't earth friendly. Also, borax does have some level of toxicity and should be used with care, but it's much less toxic than many other home care products. A mixture of borax and sugar or honey will attract and kill silverfish and ants (place out of reach of pets and children). To remove **urine smells and stains**, add half a cup of borax to the wash water for clothing and bedding, and dampen urine stains on mattresses, carpets, and upholstery with a little water, sprinkle on borax, allow to dry, and then brush or vacuum up.

Using slippers or house shoes inside your home, will reduce the need for vacuuming carpets and mopping floors. It will also help prevent the spread within your home of lead dust, lawn chemicals, leaking car fluids, animal feces, and other contaminants that cling to the soles of shoes.

So think about the materials you typically use to clean your home or business and consider switching to a less toxic alternative that could also save you money. For more information, visit greenguide.com, worldwise.com, watoxics.org, and sustainablebelmont.net.

Judy Otto is a member of Sustainable Belmont.