

Tips for a Toxin Free Household

Please note the following disclaimers and caveats before reading on, then enjoy.

1. We of the Toxin Free or Pesticide Free Ojai community group are not scientists or physicians speaking from a professional standpoint, unless specifically noted. We are lay folks seeking healthy alternatives for our selves, and sharing useful information we find with our community.
2. Just because something is natural does not mean it is safe. (Just consider Arsenic.) Many natural and proclaimed “healthy” or “natural” products are actually quite toxic. Additives such as fillers, colors and fragrances can be problematic, especially for sensitive populations including children, the elderly, and the immune compromised. And don’t forget your animals – just because a product is safe for human babies does not mean it is safe for animals, whose livers and other organs function quite differently from ours. For example, organic essential oils are highly toxic for many animals and humans.
3. Personal care items are more complicated because we absorb many things through our skin. The resources section at the end of this article includes sources for such information.
4. Anything specified for use in a particular way or level of concentration is not necessarily safe when used in other ways or higher concentrations. In other words, more is not necessarily better – and worse, it may be harmful. (For example, it is reasonably safe to use a standard 3% hydrogen peroxide solution externally. However, using it internally or at a higher concentration such as the 35% food grade type requires much more knowledge and restriction.)

So, that said, here are some tips for getting and keeping a clean, toxin free household.

Future articles will include tips for garden and lawn care, safely ridding the home of insects, household furnishings and more.

Basic cleaning ingredients

Just a few nontoxic supplies can very effectively and efficiently clean just about anything in the household.

Basic chemistry is involved in combining ingredients in a safely. So due diligence or reliably sourced recipes are advised!

Many books on nontoxic methods are now available, and some are listed in the Resources section at the end of this article.

Please note that while most sources delineate the potential concerns with Borax and other potent products which are nontoxic only when used as advised, many remain unaware of the frequent toxicity factors of essential oil use. Tea tree oil is very often recommended as an antifungal and antibacterial, which indeed it is, but it is also quite toxic. So check your references!

Basic supplies – easy to obtain, inexpensive and very safe to use

White (or cider) vinegar*: removes soap scum, hard water deposits, mold; cuts grease

Baking soda: cleans, deodorizes, absorbs oils

3% hydrogen peroxide: sanitizes, disinfects, preserves

Citrus seed extract (organic): antibacterial, antifungal, disinfectant and only a few drops are necessary

* For those with an aversion to vinegar, please note the following. Its smell dissipates quite quickly, and even those who avoid ingesting it due to mold or other sensitivities are often fine using it topically. However, lemon juice and club soda are fair substitutes for many of its uses.

Other supplies, not so safe to use so requiring some education, include:

Borax (cleaning), Zeolite (fumes/air cleaner), tea tree essential oil (fungus, mold, infections).

Biodegradable and organic are great. If we’re concerned about water shed, soil and plant life though, biocompatible is even better. Biocompatible means that the product breaks down into nutrients that are healthy and supportive for all forms of life! This is especially important for septic and gray water use. One such product, Oasis soap, was born right next door in Santa Barbara and is sold at Rainbow Bridge store here in Ojai. There is more detail here: <http://thesolar.biz/Soaps.htm>

tried and tested cleaning methods

kitchen and bathroom surfaces – a favorite way to save time, money and effort while keeping kitchens, bathrooms and foods free of bacteria, viruses, fungi, toxins, Salmonella, Shigella, E. Coli and yeast deposits. This method was devised in the 1990s by Susan Sumner, a scientist at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. It is simple, efficient and inexpensive and its' time has finally arrived for a public increasingly aware of safety concerns with retail products and cost of living. It is unbelievably cheap, simple and effective! In studies, this method sanitized heavily contaminated surfaces more effectively than chlorine bleach or any other commercial kitchen cleaner. And it leaves no streaks or stickiness on the surfaces.

Pour standard 3% Hydrogen Peroxide and regular White Vinegar (Cider Vinegar also works) into separate spray bottles. (Using both is 10 times more effective than using either one alone.)

(Safety Precaution: Do NOT mix them in a single bottle. Doing so creates an acid which is not safe and can burn.)

Spray one and then the other on counters, appliances, food preparation areas, cutting boards, wooden knife handles, etc.

Rinsing is not necessary, but is fine to do. Or just wipe dry with a cloth. Cutting boards can be safely left overnight.

You can also use these sprays to clean foods, then rinse off. Residual smell and taste fade quickly and are safe.

Nonabrasive scrub: Peroxide plus Baking Soda mixed into a paste. For really stubborn stains, let it sit for a while first.

Food: To remove E Coli:

- use the dual vinegar / peroxide spray (above) then rinse with water, or
- ¼ cup of peroxide to a sink of water; soak vegetables and fruits, rinse with cold water and drain.
- There are organic commercial products for cleaning food, if you're not inclined to make your own. Whether your food is organic or not, it often harbors invisible bacteria and mold (and if not organic, pesticide residue).

Avoiding plastics: use wax paper and rubber bands rather than plastic baggies and plastic wrap, and glass leftover containers.

Glass and Mirrors: Add ¼ cup vinegar or 1 tablespoon lemon juice to a quart of water, mix and put in a spray bottle. Wipe with newspaper for no- streak results. (Afterward you can use the newsprint in your garden as mulch under acid loving trees and shrubs.)

Drains: Put ½ cup baking soda down the drain first, then add ½ cup vinegar and let bubble for a few minutes. Then pour a kettle of boiling water down the drain to free minor clogs. If they are major, a mechanical snake usually works well.

Toilet: ¼ cup borax, left overnight then wiped clean.

NOTE: Borax has safety issues – keep away from children and pets, wear gloves when using, and do not ingest.

Floors: 1 cup vinegar added to a pail of water for rinsing just cleaned floors.

Or mix 4 parts oil-based floor cleaning soap to 1 part vinegar together with water as recommended and mop just once.

Carpet and rugs: Club soda used liberally and right away, then blotted until clear, works wonders.

Laundry:

Firstly, choose a good, toxin-free, biodegradable detergent. Watch for added fragrances.

- Vinegar is a good clothes softener if added midway through the rinse cycle of your machine.
- Baking soda also softens and deodorizes; add a cup to the machine before the clothes and soap.
- Hydrogen peroxide can often remove stains, replacing bleach when added at the beginning of the wash cycle.
- For oily stains, cover right away with baking soda and allow it to absorb the oil, then brush the soda away and rinse with cold water. If the oil has dried, make a water/baking soda paste and gently rub that in, let it sit for a few hours and then rinse to see if it's gone; if not, repeat.
- For tea stains, a paste of peroxide and baking soda often removes. If not, tighten fabric with rubber band around a bowl or cup, and pour boiling water from a kettle at a height of 3-4 feet. (Be careful not to burn yourself or any bystanders.) It works!
- For perspiration, ¼ cup of vinegar or ½ - ½ cup salt with water to cover clothes; soak then wash as usual.
- Blood and chocolate may rinse out in cold water, if caught quickly. If not, peroxide and baking soda may work.

Mothball substitutes: Firstly, store clean clothes (moths are attracted to human scent as well as wool) in air tight containers. (Preferably not out-gassing types of plastic, but that is a whole other subject.) In place of mothballs, cedar blocks and sachets containing lavender, clove and lemon balm will help repel moths in closets, drawers and containers.

Mold: Straight vinegar, tea tree and lavender essential oils, borax and zeolite can all work, but all of these materials must be used with appropriate caution due to potential toxicity effects on the respiratory system, dangers from skin contact and other factors. Further information will be forthcoming. There are also heat treatment companies that offer mold abatement services.