

A Greener Spring Cleaning



There's no way around it—cleaning supplies are nasty. Not only are they filled with toxic chemicals that cause a slew of health problems—eye irritation, rashes, coughing, and headaches (and those are the friendlier ones)—but they wreak havoc on the environment too.

“Green” cleaning supplies are safe alternatives. But not all cleaning supplies are as eco-friendly as they sound. Make sure you're getting a truly green spring clean with these pointers from Linda Mason Hunter, a Des Moines-based expert on green living and author of the books *Green Clean* and *Creating a Safe and Healthy Home*.

Look at labels

Although manufacturers aren't required to list ingredients on labels of cleaning products, certain words can give you clues about what's in the product. Avoid products with serious safety warnings such as “poison” and “danger.” And be leery of certain terms that sound environmentally friendly. “Some, like ‘natural,’ ‘nontoxic,’ ‘toxin-free,’ and ‘eco-friendly,’ have no legal definitions, so manufacturers can put them on a label and they don't mean anything,” Hunter says. “The word ‘organic’ means one thing when it's applied to food and another when applied to nonfood items. Many

solvents are labeled ‘organic’ because they're carbon-based, but they can be harmful to the environment and people.” What terms should you look for? Hunter says *biodegradable in three to five days; plant-based; hypoallergenic; contains no phosphates, chlorine, petroleum products, or ammonia; and formulated without dye or synthetic fragrance* are good indicators.

Take cues from color

Hunter recommends looking at the hue of the actual product. “If it's not a really natural color, you can bet it's made in the laboratory,” she says. Brightly colored cleaners (such as neon green) probably include synthetic coloring.

Sniff 'em

“If products smell really harsh, if they make your eyes water or nose run, you know they're harmful, and you shouldn't be using them,” Hunter says. And if your usual cleaner causes your skin to redden or makes you lightheaded, it's probably toxic too.

Make your own

“We don't need harsh cleaners,” Hunter says. By making your own cleaning products, you know you're not exposing yourself to toxic chemicals. In fact, you can clean almost anything in your house with combinations of baking soda, vinegar, and warm water. **Why not try it today?**

try this today—

When boiling water or heating food on the stove, use a lid to decrease time on the burner. A saucepan with a well-fitting lid uses a quarter less energy when boiling than a saucepan without a lid. Using the smallest burner that fits your pot helps reduce the amount of energy used too.