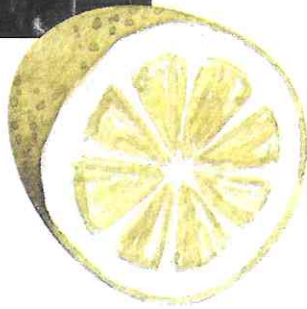




clean and green

Cleaning to protect your health and the environment is more important than ever. But whether you're spring cleaning or doing the weekly once-over, the answer isn't in an endless stream of toxin-packed products.

words NICOLE LUTZE



asthma medication, should be sprayed into our breathing air," she says. "Cleaning chemicals are made to clean surfaces and are not intended for the lining of our airways."

It was unnecessary health risks such as these that motivated Jessica Bragdon to co-found Koala Eco cleaning products with her husband, Paul. "We were constantly on the hunt for safe, affordable and chemical-free cleaning products that actually worked without synthetic fragrances," says Jessica. "We didn't want our sons to absorb chemicals every time we cleaned the family home, but we couldn't find what we wanted. So eventually, we decided to make our own."

When deciding on ingredients, Jessica drew inspiration from her love of the natural world. "I grew up adoring all things botanical," she explains. "My grandmother used to take my twin and me on long hikes through the forests around her home, pointing out flora and fauna along the way. And our mother loved gardens, so family outings often involved historic gardens or nurseries. After university, my sister and I started a florist, which we later sold."

Koala Eco utilises Australian essential oils in their products, such as tea tree and eucalyptus, which have naturally occurring antibacterial, deodorising and antiseptic qualities. "These plants have been used for tens of thousands of years by the First People of this nation, who had an extraordinary understanding of the medicinal and therapeutic properties of native plants," Jessica says. "And, despite being powerful cleaners and antiseptics, they're safe to use around babies and young children, when used correctly."

While there are a lot of great brands out there, it's also just as easy to do it yourself.

"Soapy water is cheap and effective," Mary-Louise says. Cecile agrees, adding that "research on cleaning efficiency shows that for most purposes, water and a microfibre cloth is more efficient than chemical cleaning agents". She stresses that if people still want the convenience of a commercially made non-toxic cleaning product, the safest option is to pour the product onto a cloth before wiping down surfaces instead of spraying it.

If you're using a synthetic microfibre cleaning cloth, wash it inside a microfibre laundry bag. Synthetic textiles shed tiny plastic fibres every time they are washed – making them responsible for 85% of human-made debris found on shorelines across the globe. These microfibres also enter our food chains when consumed by fish and have been found in our drinking water. A microfibre laundry bag will catch and contain any shed fibres for safe disposal.

To prevent spreading viruses and bacteria, you should also regularly wash fabrics that are frequently damp, such as dishcloths, face washers, and hand or body towels. Once laundered, hang them in the sun to dry, as the UV light can help destroy bacteria and microorganisms, leaving them smelling fresh without the hefty carbon footprint of a clothes dryer.

White vinegar, the chosen cleaning product in many frugal and sustainably focused homes, is generally an effective cleaner, as is bicarb soda; however, it's worth noting that neither of these will eliminate COVID-19.

When it comes to DIY, Tracey Bailey, founder of Biome Eco Stores – which stocks a range of both ready-made chemical-free cleaning products and bulk cleaning ingredients – the benefits of going DIY are two-fold.

"Try making your own. Start new routines and habits. You can save money by reducing your consumption, and you'll also live more healthily and sustainably," she encourages.

Avoiding excess waste is also still important and possible – even during a pandemic. But being mindful when stocking up is key, according to Tracey. "Consider the way products are packaged before you purchase them, and try to avoid unnecessary packaging where possible," she says. So that you don't end up with double-ups of the same products and unnecessary packaging, Tracey recommends using "ingredients or products you already have at home before purchasing more". "When a



We've really lost our way with understanding what we need to care for our bodies and homes adequately.



cleaning product runs out, think about whether it needs to be replaced," Tracey adds. "You can also shop for cleaning ingredients, such as castile soap, in bulk using your own containers."

Single-use wipes, which clog sewers and pollute beaches, should always be avoided – especially if lessening your environmental impact is a priority. Paper towel is also a costly, resource-intensive and unnecessary addition to your cleaning routine. The most environmentally friendly option is a reusable cloth made from natural fibres, such as organic cotton or hemp. At the end of its lifecycle, the cloth is compostable.

"You really don't need a large selection of packaged products to clean your home," Tracey explains. "Soap and water are adequate, and oxygen bleach is perfect for disinfecting."

"Chlorine bleach is problematic for so many people. The fumes can irritate your lungs, it's harmful to your skin and can damage surfaces. If you're like me and cannot tolerate the smell of chlorine bleach or don't want to use it for environmental reasons, the alternative is sodium percarbonate – more commonly known as oxygen bleach."

To use oxygen bleach, mix the powder into a paste with hot water and leave it on the surface for about five minutes before wiping it off. The surface should look visibly wet the entire time. Don't store your mixture in a sealed container though – over time the components will react and release oxygen gas bubbles, which can cause the container to explode.

At the end of the day, whether you make your own or choose from one of the many chemical-free products available, Tracey believes that it's time to start rethinking how we clean.

"We've really lost our way with understanding what we need to care for our bodies and homes adequately," says Tracey. "We've been marketed to and influenced to believe we need to use all kinds of chemicals when, in fact, using them can be harmful to our health and the planet. We need to simplify and get back to basics." ☘



LEFT: JESSICA AND PAUL, KOALA ECO. ABOVE: TRACEY, BIOME ECO STORES.