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Ask an expert

How to clean chemical free

Reducing the reliance on chemical cleaners is good for your family – and the environment



Q I have seen a lot lately about the potential risks of using chemical cleaners around the house because of their possible adverse affects on our health but I still want a clean house. What are my options?

A There are so many cleaning products available on the market making all sorts of claims but in recent years more people are turning to traditional or new chemical-free options. With growing numbers of adults and children reporting chemical sensitivity, more households are considering alternative products.

Jessica Bragdon (pictured), owner of Koala Eco, a new company selling chemical-free cleaning products says she started her business

after she became concerned about the household chemicals she was exposing her family to.

“I’ve got two young children and I just felt every time I was cleaning the mirrors I was spraying product that was falling down over their toothbrushes,” she says. “I was holding my breath because it had ammonia in it.”

“I thought there’s got to be a better way to get something that smells fantastic, does just as good a job cleaning and doesn’t leave you worried about extra chemicals you’re bringing into your house.”

Jessica hired a chemist to help formulate the Koala Eco range of cleaners, which is 100 per cent plant-derived, biodegradable and scented with essential oils.

Her products are free of chlorine, ammonia, parabens, sulfates including SLS and SLES and coco-betaine, which



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is a foaming agent, and preservatives, which can cause irritations and allergic reactions in some people.

She says traditional household cleaning products also have fragrances that are not natural, which means additional chemicals.

It's a good idea to check your labels before use, especially when opting for fragrant cleaners.

"Basically there are no rules with fragrance," Jessica says.

"A lot of the time companies say they've taken out certain things in a product that are bad but they still have synthetic fragrance and that can be made by any combination of petrochemicals.

"I would much rather have a beautiful smell from an essential oil when I know what it is, rather than something that's completely artificial and you're not really sure what you're breathing in."

Cleaning with naturally derived ingredients is also a better choice for the environment.

"All the oils we use are sourced in Australia, they're unique to Australia, there's nothing imported," Jessica says.

"We use eucalyptus oil, lemon myrtle oil, lemon tree oil and peppermint oil.

"They can do the same things (as other cleaners) where they are antifungal, non toxic and they can also disinfect like a chemical cleaner."

While the market for chemical-free cleaners is growing, traditional cleaning products are enjoying renewed popularity.

Best of all, most of them can be found in your average pantry.

Choice reports that white vinegar is often a more effective mould killer than bleach, a powerful mix of chlorine and caustic soda which can be dangerous, especially to children.

The Office Of Environment And Heritage also points to borax, a naturally occurring mineral salt, as an effective cleaner, disinfectant and deodoriser.

Whether you use traditional cleaners or go with newer products, Jessica says more people are taking notice of their everyday chemical exposure and making informed choices.

"I think it's a great thing that's happening and will continue to grow," she says.

"There's been a real groundswell movement towards non-toxic chemical-free products."

More koala.eco; choice.com.au; environment.nsw.gov.au

NATURAL CLEANING SOLUTIONS

Bicarb soda

Neutralises acid. It cleans up acidic stains and messes, works as a mild abrasive, shines up aluminium, chrome, silver, and other metals and unclogs and cleans drains. Also cuts grease and dirt and deodorises.

Vinegar

Fights stains, scum, mildew, germs, and can make windows gleam.

Salt

A natural scrubbing agent.

Liquid Castile soap

Vegetable-based soap and a versatile cleaning agent.

Sunshine

The ultraviolet radiation in sunlight works to kill germs and rid laundry of dust mites and bacteria.

Beeswax

Melted with olive oil and a few drops of essential oils and then left to cool, beeswax can be used as a natural furniture polish that can be rubbed into wood.

Tea tree oil

It is antimicrobial and an effective fungicide to stop mildew growth. It is useful in laundry detergent and domestic surface cleaners. Good for air purification and an effective air sanitiser or purifier, it also rids pet bedding of microbes and parasites.

Eucalyptus oil

While it gives a nice, fresh natural fragrance to your home, it is also antimicrobial, antibacterial, a deodoriser and a disinfectant.

Clove oil

It has antifungal properties and can be used to treat mould along with vinegar.

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koala.eco





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