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WEEKEND PROJECT: CLEAR CLUTTER!

by Robyn Griggs Lawrence, Editor at Large

I can't take it any more. I might be a bit early, but this weekend I'm starting my spring cleaning. It could take a while. Clearing out the clutter that's piled up all winter and reorganizing my somewhat disheveled home is a big project—and one that will bring me unmatched peace and serenity when it's complete. Clearing off surfaces, drawers and closets is the first step. For this, I'm following [my own advice](#), from Natural Home magazine's archives.

- Don't try to declutter your entire house at once. Start small, with a drawer or a shelf, then build up to problem areas (like the garage or the basement) once you've had some smaller successes.
- Take everything out of a drawer or closet and spread it out in front of you. You'll eliminate more and organize more efficiently if you can see it all at once. (This also gives you a chance to clear out dust and run a damp rag over surfaces.)
- As you clear out, have four boxes or bags marked Keep, Give Away, Recycle and Hold for One Year. (The last one's for items you don't need or use but just can't bear to part with yet. If you haven't touched them in a year, their time has come.)
- Storage is key to containing clutter. Storage areas should make up at least 10 percent of your home's total square footage and be strategically placed where needed.
- Keep clutter contained. Use baskets and bowls to collect mail, pens and pencils, loose change, and all the other odds and ends that collect on counters and tabletops.
- Get rid of two items every time you buy a new one.
- Allow only three items on each surface.
- Just say no to refrigerator magnets. They encourage clutter.
- Keep windowsills clear of knickknacks and potted plants.

For me, the battle against clutter never ends. After this major effort, I'm vowing to spend 15 minutes every day cleaning up before clutter becomes a permanent fixture. By Sunday, I will have gotten ahead of the mess. I aim to keep it that way. Wish me luck.

Maximizing Minimalism: Clear Clutter for a Tidy Home

Imagine walking in the door at the end of a long day to an orderly, tidy home, where everything is in its place. Does that sound like heaven? It doesn't have to be unattainable. Your home and your housekeeping routine should be manageable and lend you peace of mind, not act as a source of stress. Unfortunately, rather than feeling replenished by their abodes, many American families battle chaos at home, and usually for one major reason: Too much stuff. A 2012 study by the UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families found that managing clutter is a crushing problem in many homes.

In fact, clutter can even be a health concern, raising mothers' stress hormone levels. (Interestingly, it does not appear to have the same effect on men.) Clutter is insidious. It can creep into our homes, slowly accumulating until it is difficult to clear the dining room table or make a walkable path up the stairs. But we can control our stuff rather than letting our stuff control us. Here, we offer a few ideas for keeping things where they belong. (For more decluttering tips, read [Weekend Project: Clear Clutter!](#).) If your belongings just don't fit into your home, consider purging things you don't use—you'll be happier and healthier for it.

Clear Clutter in the Kitchen

Clear Fridge, Clear Mind: The UCLA study found that one single space in a family's home was the best indicator of how cluttered the entire home would be: the front of the refrigerator door. The amount of clutter on the fridge door was directly related to the amount of clutter in the rest of the home—and its residents' lives. Therefore, it may make sense to start your decluttering mission by clearing your fridge door.

Tool Time: Assess your kitchen's contents with a critical eye. Identify essentials, and donate the rest. Get rid of multiples of tools and resist single-use appliances that eat up storage space.

Open Up: In many cases, it's easy to convert kitchen cabinets to open shelving, and it can help declutter your kitchen. When you can see everything on those kitchen shelves, you're more likely to eliminate junk and keep only beautiful dishes you enjoy using daily.

Living Room

Storage Style: When it comes to décor, consider incorporating beautiful storage areas. Rather than a piece of art on that blank wall, put up a bookshelf. You can house books, records and photo albums (and just about anything else if it's hidden in a bin or basket)

on the bottom shelves, and reserve the top shelves for family photos, framed postcards or decorative items.

Corral Clutter: Living areas can become a dumping ground for everyone's items. To combat this, keep a basket or tray in the open. During a commercial break or at the end of the day, grab the container, toss in items that belong elsewhere and return each item to its proper place (or owner) without making multiple trips.

Toy Totaler: If your home is overwhelmed with kids' toys, choose a large vessel—a toy chest, basket or bin—and let your child choose which items to keep “in play.” Everything that doesn't fit in the container goes into a storage box. Once every three months, let kids pull out the box and choose new toys to keep out. To keep toys in check, have your child choose a toy to donate for any new toy she gets, and ask adults to replace gifts with experiences such as a trip to the zoo, the children's museum or the movies.

Get Real: The UCLA researchers found that when people replaced an item, they held onto the old one, hoping to recoup its value via eBay or a garage sale. Instead, they ended up storing the old item indefinitely. You will find more health value in decluttering than you could ever get out of your old stuff. Make a family habit out of donating to shelters or thrift stores every few months.

Clear Clutter in the Bedroom

Bed Head: Making the bed in the morning takes only a minute, but it's amazing the difference it makes in your feeling of calm as you prepare for bed at night in a tidy space.

Clothes Call: We all know the pains of a snowballing clothes basket. If you find yourself with piles of clothes waiting to be put away, check your storage. Do you have room for all your things? You may need to purge. Abide by a simple rule: If you don't love it, give it to someone who will. Arrange clothing swaps with friends or drop them off at a donation center. Also consider packing away off-season items, clearing room for your seasonal wardrobe.

Home Office Organization

All Business: Clear space on your desk daily, either before work or after, whenever your brain can most use a rest. Like anywhere in our homes, everything needs a place. Tuck small vessels into drawers to keep them organized. Store loose paper in magazine holders. Keep a bulletin board to display often-used information. Use floating shelves to keep supplies organized but easily accessible.

Mail Model: Do you find piles of mail in your entryway, on your kitchen table and shoved into drawers? Create a station where you process mail when it comes in. Include a recycling bin, stamps for outgoing mail, and a place to store important paperwork. Get ideas for your mail station in [Get Organized! Clear Clutter with a Home Mail Center](#).

Beat Bathroom Clutter

Cabinet Clearance: Discard makeup, medications and anything that hasn't been used in the last year. Makeup doesn't last forever; mascara is toast after about three months, while lipsticks can last up to two years. Toss unused medications, following any specific disposal instructions or donating to community take-back programs that collect unused medication for safe disposal.

Top Drawer: Make sure drawers aren't too full. It's better to keep one easy-to-grab brush than have 10 stuffed into a drawer. If you've pared back but your bathroom still feels stuffed, add storage. Wall-mounted shelves and containers that hang on the back of a door can free up space. Baskets, bins and tins help keep things organized.

Cleaning Schedule: A Tidy Home in 30 Minutes a Day

Finding time to clean your decluttered home is as easy as following a routine. The most important guidelines for your cleaning schedule start with you and your lifestyle—your system should work for you, making it second nature to toss in a load of laundry before dinner and fold it after, wipe down counters while chatting after dinner and load the dishwasher every morning. And it should be realistic. The system has to factor in the size of your home, the number of household members and your family's available time. We've provided a basic schedule that can be customized based on your circumstances. Our system is for a small household with one or two people working a full-time workweek. By following this schedule, you should rarely have to devote more than 30 minutes in any day to cleaning.

Clear Clutter Daily

Morning: Make bed. Toss laundry into hamper. Clear dirty glasses from nightstands. Wipe kitchen sink and counter areas. Empty dishwasher. Take out trash/sort recycling.

Evening: Straighten living area, returning any wayward items to their places. Process mail. Load dishwasher. Rotate in the task of the day from the lists below.

Once A Week

Monday: Sweep/vacuum and dust surfaces

Tuesday: Change bed linens

Wednesday: Laundry

Thursday: Clean bathroom

Friday: Wipe down kitchen surfaces, including appliance exteriors

Bimonthly

(consider doing one task every other Saturday morning)

- Wipe down scuff marks on walls throughout home
- Clean exterior windows, inside and out
- Clean out the interior of kitchen appliances such as the refrigerator and oven
- Clean out gutters

Adjustments

Laundry: A family with children will generate more laundry and need a more incremental system. Consider doing one load a day (or as one load is dirtied), putting the laundry on before starting dinner and folding it during family downtime later that evening.

Bathrooms: If you have more than one bathroom, add one bathroom cleaning to a light chore night, in this case Tuesday, or add it to Saturday morning.

Yard: Depending on where you live, you might want to incorporate seasonal outdoor duties such as mowing, sweeping or raking into your home-maintenance routine.

Divide and Conquer: Divide up these tasks among family members. If you are a two-person household, distribute tasks based on strengths (Who is the better cook?); preferences (Does one person despise laundry but doesn't mind scrubbing toilets?); and available time. If you have a larger family, maybe some of the children are old enough to take on the chore of vacuuming and dusting their rooms, laundry folding or kitchen clean-up.

CHEMISTRY BEHIND NATURAL CLEANERS

Learning to clean from scratch—making homemade recipes—can truly work if you take time to understand a bit about the chemistry behind how the materials work. Here are the five ingredients that I find to be the safest, most effective, and useful for cleaning.

Baking Soda

A commonly available mineral full of many cleaning attributes, baking soda is made from soda ash, and is slightly alkaline (its pH is around 8.1; 7 is neutral). It neutralizes acid-based odors in water, and adsorbs odors from the air. Sprinkled on a damp sponge or cloth, baking soda can be used as a gentle non-abrasive cleanser for kitchen counter tops, sinks, bathtubs, ovens, and fiberglass. It will eliminate perspiration odors and even neutralize the smell of many chemicals if you add up to a cup per load to the laundry. It is a useful air freshener, and a fine carpet deodorizer.

Washing Soda

A chemical neighbor of baking soda, washing soda (sodium carbonate) is much more strongly alkaline, with a pH around 11. It releases no harmful fumes and is far safer than a commercial solvent formula, but you should wear gloves when using it because it is caustic. Washing soda cuts grease, cleans petroleum oil, removes wax or lipstick, and neutralizes odors in the same way that baking soda does. Don't use it on fiberglass, aluminum or waxed floors—unless you intend to remove the wax.

White Vinegar and Lemon Juice

White vinegar and lemon juice are acidic—they neutralize alkaline substances such as scale from hard water. Acids dissolve gummy buildup, eat away tarnish, and remove dirt from wood surfaces.

Liquid Soaps and Detergent

Liquid soaps and detergents are necessary for cutting grease, and they are not the same thing. Soap is made from fats and lye. Detergents are synthetic materials discovered and synthesized early in this century. Unlike soap, detergents are designed specifically so that they don't react with hard water minerals and cause soap scum. If you have hard water, buy a biodegradable detergent without perfumes; if you have soft water you can use liquid soap (both are available in health food stores).

Mold Killers and Disinfectants

For a substance to be registered by the EPA as a disinfectant it must go through extensive and expensive tests. EPA recommends simple soap to use as a disinfectant. There are many essential oils, such as lavender, clove, and tea tree oil (an excellent natural

fungicide), that are very antiseptic, as is grapefruit seed extract, even though they aren't registered as such. Use one teaspoon of essential oil to 2 cups of water in a spray bottle (make sure to avoid eyes). A grapefruit seed extract spray can be made by adding 20 drops of extract to a quart of water.

Caution: Make sure to keep all homemade formulas well-labeled, and out of the reach of children.

CLEANING RECIPES WITH ESSENTIAL OILS

By Karyn Siegel Maier

Citrus oils smell great, and they're also natural degreasers.

Nearly everyone has heard about the virtues of common items such as baking soda and vinegar for scouring and absorbing grease. Adding herbal essential oils enhances a formula's cleaning value and leaves behind a soothing, natural scent. It's not just an advertising gimmick that many commercial products contain citrus oils such as lemon or lime—they are natural degreasers and have antimicrobial properties. Using natural products instead of chemical-laden commercial ones makes household tasks almost a pleasure to tackle. I know it's hard to get excited about cleaning a bathroom, but when you realize that the surfaces are germ- and toxin-free, and the soothing aroma of cedar or lavender lingers, you won't be able to suppress a smile of satisfaction. And that enthusiasm is contagious—even the kids will want to pitch in!

Cleaning with Natural Ingredients Saves Time, Space and Money

Making your own natural cleaning recipes is not time-consuming or expensive. In fact, quite the opposite is true. It only takes a minute or two to fill a spray bottle with vinegar and water and add a few drops of essential oil. Bingo— instant glass and appliance cleaner! Having done that, there's one less aisle to visit in the supermarket. The majority of commercial cleaners are quite expensive. A typical spray or foam cleanser for the bathroom, for instance, can cost \$4 or more. A natural alternative, on the other hand, will cost pennies to make. You can buy essential oils for an average of \$3 to \$5 per half fluid ounce. Because you only use 5 to 30 drops of the oil (depending on the formula), that half-ounce goes a long way. Other all-natural ingredients such as vinegar, baking soda, water and castile soap are also inexpensive.

You will marvel at the amount of uncluttered space that becomes available in the area where you store cleaning supplies. According to Debra Lynn Dadd, author of [*Toxic Free*](#), the average kitchen is home to 30 or more commercial products, the laundry room six! Many of the herbal formulas you will be making are multipurpose, so the number of cleaning products you store will be greatly reduced—an immense help to those of us with only a little bit of space under the sink or in a closet.

Ingredients for Natural Cleaning Recipes:

Baking soda: Otherwise known as bicarbonate of soda, you can find this ingredient in any supermarket, usually in the baking supplies aisle.

Citrus seed extract: Usually made from grapefruit seed, this natural preservative is a powerful antimicrobial agent. Often sold as grapefruit seed extract, it is available at health-food stores or by mail order.

Essential oils: Read about selecting essential oils in “Essential Oils 101” at the end of this article. These natural cleaning recipes include lime; sweet orange; rosemary, eucalyptus or tea tree; thyme; lemon or lemongrass; and peppermint or citronella; all are available via health-food stores or mail order.

Lemon juice: Lemon juice is readily available in supermarkets.

Liquid castile soap: An olive oil-based soap, liquid castile is available at health-food stores, some supermarkets or via mail order.

Salt: Choose kosher salt for scrubbing; available in supermarkets.

Vinegar: Vinegar is found in the oil aisle of any supermarket. To avoid buying petroleum byproducts, choose vinegar marked “grain alcohol,” “neutral grain spirits” or that lists the natural ingredients it’s derived from.

Washing soda: Some stores stock washing soda—also known as sodium carbonate or soda ash—in the laundry products aisle. If yours doesn’t, order it online.

Herbal Disinfectant

A super disinfectant formula that’s incredibly easy to make

2 cups hot water
10 drops thyme essential oil
1/4 cup washing soda

Combine all ingredients in a spray bottle and shake well. Spray on surfaces and wipe clean with a damp cloth or sponge.

Citrus Dishwashing Blend

Dishwashing liquids have been designed to lure the consumer with their stimulating lemony scent. Wash in very hot water to kill germs. Air dry, cloth towels spread germs.

Recipe 1

Liquid castile soap
20 drops lime essential oil
10 drops sweet orange essential oil
5 drops citrus seed extract

Recipe 2

Liquid castile soap
10 drops lemon oil
6 drops bergamot
4 drops lavender, 2 drops orange

Fill a clean 22-ounce squirt bottle with castile soap (diluted according to directions if using concentrate). Add the essential oils and extract. Shake the bottle before each use. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of liquid to dishwater and wash as usual.

Super-Easy Automatic Dishwasher Powder

This formula is effortless to make, and because it stores well it can be doubled or made in bulk.

Recipe 1

3 cups washing soda
1 cup baking soda

Recipe 2

2 cups washing soda, 2 cups borax
20 drops lavender essential oil

Combine all ingredients and store in a sealed container. To use, add about 2 tablespoons to the soap compartment of your dishwasher. If you find your glasses are getting a residue of buildup, then reduce to 1 1/2 tablespoons.

Sink Scrubber for Stains

For stubborn stains, allow this formula to rest on the stain for several minutes, then scrub and rinse with vinegar and hot water.

1/4 cup washing soda
1/4 cup baking soda
8 drops rosemary, eucalyptus or tea tree essential oil
3/4 cup vinegar for rinsing

Combine washing soda, baking soda and essential oil in an airtight container and shake well to blend. Sprinkle a small amount into the sink and scrub with a damp sponge. Rinse the sink with vinegar, then with hot water.

Serious Oven-Cleaning Formula

This formula is great for ovens that have been neglected for a while. If you have a lot of baked-on grease or food splatters, you may want to use fine steel wool to scrub those areas. Use a bit more salt if necessary.

1/2 cup salt
1/4 cup washing soda
1 box (16 ounces) baking soda
Scant 1/4 cup water
3/4 cup white vinegar
10 drops thyme essential oil
10 drops lemon or lemongrass essential oil

Combine salt, washing soda and baking soda in a glass bowl. Add just enough water to make a paste. Remove oven racks and preheat oven to 250 degrees for 15 minutes, then turn off the oven and leave the door open. Carefully spread the paste on oven walls with a sponge or cloth and allow to set for 20 to 30 minutes. Combine the vinegar and essential oils in a spray bottle and shake well. Spray the oven walls and wipe clean. Rinse well.

Germs-Be-Gone Toilet Cleaner

This antibacterial spray cleaner is specially formulated for cleaning the general surface area of the toilet, and under and behind the seat.

2 cups water
1/4 cup liquid castile soap

1 tablespoon tea tree essential oil
10 drops eucalyptus or peppermint essential oil

Combine all ingredients in a spray bottle and shake well. Spray on toilet surfaces and wipe clean with damp cloth or sponge.

Peppermint Foam Carpet Shampoo

This formula is great for heavy-traffic areas.

3 cups water
3/4 cup liquid castile soap
10 drops peppermint essential oil

Mix all ingredients in a blender. Rub foam into soiled areas with a damp sponge. Let dry thoroughly, then vacuum.

Ready-When-You-Need-'Em Kitchen Wipes

Instead of using paper towels to wipe spills or clean countertops, store multiple squares of cotton cloth in a container filled with a mixture of 1 cup water, 1 ounce liquid castile soap and 6 to 8 drops of your favorite essential oil. The cloths, made from old T-shirts or pajamas, can be washed and returned to the jar for reuse. Cap jar between uses.

Cleaning with Essential Oils

Make sure you're buying pure, undiluted essential oil. Although there are grade differences among pure essential oils, these differences pertain to the quality of the fragrance—for the purpose of household cleaning, they are insignificant. Essential oils should come in either blue or brown glass bottles. If stored away from heat and direct light, some essential oils retain their potency indefinitely. Citrus oils are an exception; they usually last for about one year.

Use only the amount of oil called for in a recipe. The oils are highly concentrated, and adding more won't make a superstrong formula; instead, it can increase the risk of skin irritation. Always practice caution when handling essential oils (wearing protective gloves is recommended), and never allow children to handle pure oils. Take special care with food-related oils; citrus oil, for example, could offer a temptation to a young child who may mistake a finished product as something to eat or drink. Exercise the same

caution with herbal cleaning formulations as you would with any commercial cleaner, and keep them away from pets and children.

Controlling Kitchen Pests

Even the cleanest of kitchens are susceptible to unwanted visitors. Give bugs the boot with these quick remedies.

Ants: Wipe cabinets with a damp sponge and 6 to 8 drops peppermint or citronella essential oil. Then place 3 to 5 drops of the same oil on windowsills, doorway cracks and in the corners of cabinets under the kitchen sink.

Centipedes, earwigs, silverfish: Place several drops of peppermint, eucalyptus or citronella essential oil in areas that collect moisture such as basements, garages and cabinets that house plumbing fixtures.

Cockroaches: Sprinkle a mixture of washing soda and sugar in dark areas where roaches like to hide, but avoid this method if you have children or pets. It may be best to consult an exterminator.

Mice: Place sprigs of fresh peppermint between pantry items in your cabinets, or make a solution of 2 cups water and 3 teaspoons of peppermint essential oil and spray it wherever you find mouse droppings.

Mites and weevils: Place a few whole nutmegs in flour containers.

Other insects: Place loose bay leaves in kitchen cabinets.

Don't Give Up on Tough Cleaning Jobs

- For very greasy dishes, add 1/2 cup vinegar or lemon juice to dishwasher.
- To loosen baked-on food from pots and pans, immediately add some baking soda to the dirty dish and wait 15 minutes before cleaning. If the pot or pan has cooled before you've had a chance to add baking soda, boil a solution of 1 cup water, 5 drops cedar or other essential oil, and 3 tablespoons baking soda directly in the pot or pan. Allow mixture to stand until food can be scraped off easily.

Adapted with permission from [The Naturally Clean Home](#) by Karyn Siegel-Maier, featuring 150 easy natural cleaning recipes.

NATURAL ARSENAL/CLEANING RECIPES

By Mindy Pennybacker

The labels on most household products read like the periodic table violently collided with a bowl of alphabet soup. What are those ingredients, and what might they do to our homes, our pets and our loved ones? A foolproof way to know what's in your cleaning products is to make them yourself. It's easy and economical, with the added benefit of reducing your household's carbon footprint by creating less packaging waste and less pollution from manufacturing and shipping.

Wing It!

Feel free to improvise with proportions; none of these recipes are set in stone. When it comes to making soft scrubs, I find myself mixing until the right texture is achieved. It's like cooking a favorite recipe—rely on instinct and use trial and error to refine. The fun part is trying out essential oils to find your preferred fragrance. DIY cleaning will soon become second nature, and your home will look, feel and smell naturally fresh.

Shopping List

With these 15 items, you can clean just about anything.

- Baking Soda: scrubbing, whitening
- Beeswax: polishing wood
- Borax (sodium borate): removing stains/disinfecting
- Club Soda (or any unflavored fizzy water): lifting stains
- Cornstarch: absorbing stains
- Hydrogen Peroxide: disinfecting, removing stains
- Lemon: removing stains and odors
- Liquid Dish Soap: sudsing power
- Olive Oil: polishing wood
- Pine Oil: cleaning soft wood floors
- Plant Essential Oils: chemical-free fragrance (do a sniff test before buying to make sure you're not sensitive to the fumes)
- Salt: scrubbing
- Toothpaste: polishing metal

- Washing Soda (sodium carbonate): scrubbing, removing stains and cutting grease
- White Vinegar: disinfecting, removing stains

Un-Dirty Dozen: 12 Easy Cleaners

Remember, even all-natural cleaning ingredients can be irritating. Open windows to ventilate rooms while you clean, and wear gloves. Store homemade cleaners in sealed containers in a cool, dry place.

Carpets and Drapes

Attack fresh stains and spills right away by covering them with absorbent baking soda or cornstarch. Leave for 10 to 15 minutes, then sprinkle with club soda (the fizz helps lift stains), and vacuum and/or blot. Do not rub fresh stains, which can spread them, or use hot water, which can set them.

To clean carpets and drapes, get rid of surface dirt by vacuuming, hanging, shaking out and, if necessary, beating with a broom handle. Next, presoak stains with the solutions below, depending on the type of fabric, for 30 minutes, taking care to spot-test fabric for colorfastness first.

- For wool or silk, use equal parts cold water and white vinegar or lemon juice.
- For cotton, linen or synthetic fabrics, use equal parts cold water mixed with hydrogen peroxide, baking or washing soda, or borax.

Following spot removal, wash drapes or area rugs in cold water with liquid soap, old soap bar slivers or natural laundry soap. Because agitation and heat can damage delicate fabrics, wash wool, silk and rayon by hand in a sink or on the gentle cycle of your washer, then hang dry. If you have wall-to-wall carpet, vacuum, then steam-clean using water with a few drops of liquid soap, or simply wipe the entire surface with hot soapy water on a wrung-out rag, sponge or mop, taking care not to let water soak in. A wet carpet can easily grow mildew and mold.

Toilet Bowl

Scrub with 1/2 cup of borax to brighten and disinfect. For daily maintenance, brush the bowl with baking soda and let it sit for a bit before flushing. Add white vinegar for a little extra stain-lifting fizz.

All-Purpose Cleaner

Use on any non-wood surface.

1/2 cup borax
1 gallon hot water

Mix until borax is dissolved; mop or spray and wipe surfaces.

Floor and Wall Cleaner

Use this on any floor, including wood, and on walls.

1 cup white vinegar
1 gallon hot water
1 tablespoon to 1/4 cup liquid soap (optional)
1 to 2 tablespoons pine or lemon oil (optional)

For extra cleaning power, add liquid soap. Add pine or lemon oil (essential oil of lavender or rosemary are less-intense alternatives) to condition un-laminated wood floors. Mix all ingredients and clean floor or walls with mop or damp rag. Follow with a clean-water mop if you use soap.

Glass Cleaner

Shine on without toxic ammonia-based products.

1/4 cup white vinegar or
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 cups water
3 to 4 drops liquid soap (optional)

Mix and spray or wipe on; for the best shine, use old newspapers!

Encrusted Gunk Buster

Avoid chlorine-based scrubs by making your own scrubbing bubbles.

Baking soda, washing soda or salt

Wipe surface with hot water; sprinkle on soda or salt. Let sit for a few minutes, then scrub with a rag, sponge or brush.

Fume-Free Oven Cleaner

Avoid caustic lye-based products and still make your oven sparkle.

1 cup baking soda
1/4 to 1/2 cup washing soda
1 tablespoon liquid soap
Hot water
Few drops white vinegar

Make sure oven is off and totally cool. No need to disconnect power. Wipe off surface soot and any fresh spills. Combine dry ingredients and gradually add hot water until you have a thick but malleable paste. For greasy ovens, add an additional 1/4 cup washing soda. Add vinegar (watch it fizz!). Coat all oven surfaces and leave overnight. Wipe off with warm water.

Soft Scrub

Use this non-scratching, chlorine-free paste on enamel or porcelain.

1 cup baking soda or borax
Warm water
2 to 3 drops liquid soap

Combine baking soda or borax with enough water to form a paste. Add liquid soap. Apply to surfaces, let sit at least 5 minutes, and scrub with a non-abrasive sponge. Rinse and wipe off residue.

Grout Cleaner

Kill mildew and whiten grout without chlorine.

Baking soda
White vinegar or hydrogen peroxide

Combine ingredients to make a paste. Let stand 30 minutes or more, then scrub.

Lye-Free Drain Cleaner

For a clogged drain, use a plumber's snake or an untwisted coat hanger to pull out as much gunk as possible. Pour 1/2 cup baking or washing soda down the drain; gradually add 1/2 cup white vinegar. Let fizz and dissolve. Carefully pour in boiling water from a tea kettle. Wait half an hour. Repeat as necessary. Before calling a plumber, let things cool off and snake again.

Germ Killer

Avoid cleaners with chlorine bleach and toxic antibacterial agents such as triclosan and triclocarban. The American Medical Association advises against using antibacterial products because they may not be any more effective than regular soap, and they promote the proliferation of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. A wipe-down with white vinegar or hydrogen peroxide provides adequate disinfecting for kitchen and bathroom surfaces—and don't forget door handles. Remember, the best way to get rid of germs is plain soap and hot water!

The Real Deal Air Freshener

Many commercial air fresheners contain hormone-disrupting chemicals such as phthalates. The healthiest alternative: fresh air! Open the windows. Place an odor-absorbing dish of baking soda or borax on kitchen and bathroom counters out of reach of children and pets. Make your own potpourri by drying flower petals and herbs; these absorb odors and replace them with their own natural scent.

Ditch the Toxins

Avoid these toxic ingredients when buying cleaning products:

- Alkylphenol ethoxylates
- Ammonia
- Chlorine
- Glycol ethers
- Lye
- Nonylphenol ethoxylate
- Sodium laureth sulfate
- Sodium lauryl sulfate
- Synthetic fragrance
- Terpenes

- Triclosan and other antibacterial agents (phenols, formaldehyde, petroleum solvents, perchloroethylene, butyl cellosolve)

Mindy Pennybacker is the author of Do One Green Thing: Saving the Earth Through Simple, Everyday Choices. Get her green-cleaning tips and more at greenerpenny.com.

EASY HOMEMADE CLEANERS

Freshen your home for spring with natural, homemade cleaners.

You have plenty of excellent reasons to ditch commercial cleaners. Most cleaners contain a wide range of chemicals known as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are released into the air inside our homes at room temperature—part of the reason why nearly all indoor air is more polluted than outdoor air. Numerous studies confirm that, after cleaning with conventional products, a room’s VOC levels increase significantly, often reaching levels higher than the acceptable values established by the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute and high enough to lead to progressive eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as increased risk of asthma.

The toxic chemicals in conventional cleaners also make them hazardous in homes with children or pets, where accidental ingestion can lead to poisoning and death. This is why many cleaners’ labels contain words like “Danger,” “Warning,” “Caution,” “Toxic” or “Poison.” Contrast this with a home cleaning arsenal made up of vinegar, baking soda, hydrogen peroxide and lemon juice: If consumed in large quantities, these ingredients may lead to an upset tummy, but they are not poisonous.

The manufacture of conventional cleaning products is also concerning. Manufacturers often release chlorine bleach, for example, into local water bodies, where it can create persistent organic pollutants such as dioxins, which linger in water and soil and take years to disappear. Dioxins are found throughout the world in the environment and they accumulate in the food chain, mainly in the fatty tissue of animals, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). More than 90 percent of human exposure is through food—mostly meat, dairy products, fish and shellfish. Dioxins are highly toxic and can cause reproductive and developmental problems, damage the immune system, interfere with hormones, and can also cause cancer, according to the WHO.

Finally, you will save money creating your own household cleaners. Vinegar, baking soda, washing soda and castile soap are cheap and they go a long way. Essential oils are a bit more expensive, but most household cleaning recipes call for only a few drops. Buy essential oils packaged in dark brown or blue glass and store them out of sunlight and they will last for at least a year.

We often hear from readers who are content to use vinegar and baking soda for all-purpose cleaning but are tempted to turn to chemical cleaners for “tough jobs.” To create a truly all-purpose nontoxic cleaning arsenal, check out the following pages for some basic at-home mixing instructions, then find specific, effective recipes for hitting your home’s toughest cleaning jobs.

Natural Cleaning Basics

When it comes to everyday cleaning—countertops, sinks, furniture, floors, toilets—you can use the same basic, powerhouse ingredients with a few easy-to-find additions and clean any area of your home. Our guide will give you the tools to create your own effective, custom cleaning blends.

Vinegar: Disinfecting, Antibacterial

Made by fermenting any material that contains sugar, vinegar is created when yeast and the microorganism acetobacter turn sugar into acid. Vinegar has dozens of uses such as deodorizing and degreasing, but its most important attributes are its ability to kill harmful bacteria and viruses.

In a University of Florida study, vinegar reduced viral and bacterial pathogens from inoculated strawberries by 95 and 90 percent respectively. When buying vinegar, check the label to make sure it’s made from natural ingredients. If the label says “grain alcohol,” “neutral grain spirits” or “wine,” it’s made from natural ingredients such as corn, apples or grapes. If it says “synthetic alcohol,” it is likely petroleum-based.

Most Basic Vinegar All-Purpose Cleaner

1 cup vinegar
4 cups water

Pour into a spray bottle and use as a light disinfectant.

Add Lemon

If you don’t like the scent of vinegar, you can neutralize its odor with lemon juice. Add a few squeezes of fresh lemon juice to any vinegar cleaning blend.

Add Essential Oils

Add essential oils to your all-purpose cleaner to give it a lovely scent and to increase its cleaning power. Many essential oils have strong antibacterial and antifungal properties. Some essential oils that smell wonderful but will also bring disinfectant properties to your cleaners include peppermint, eucalyptus, tea tree, lemon, lavender, orange, thyme and pine.

Add Olive Oil

Olive oil nourishes wood surfaces and helps them shine. To polish any wood surface in your home, combine ¼ cup olive oil, 4 tablespoons vinegar and 2 teaspoons lemon juice. Store in a spray bottle in the fridge and shake before using.

Serious Disinfecting with Vinegar

Vinegar is an effective cleaning agent for most purposes. But if you're looking to kill food-borne pathogens, it's important to use natural cleaners correctly. In studies testing the effectiveness of hydrogen peroxide and vinegar at killing *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella*, researchers at Ohio State University Extension found:

- Undiluted hydrogen peroxide and undiluted white vinegar were both effective against all three pathogens after one minute, but only when warmed to 150 degrees and used while at 130 degrees or above (heat vinegar in saucepan or the microwave).
- At room temperature, hydrogen peroxide was effective against *E. coli* and *Salmonella* if left on surfaces for 10 minutes. It did not kill *Listeria monocytogenes*.
- At room temperature, white distilled vinegar was effective against *Salmonella* if left on surfaces for 10 minutes, but not against the other two pathogens.
- Other studies have found vinegar and hydrogen peroxide together to be a powerful disinfectant, but never mix the two. To disinfect surfaces, first clean with soap and water. Then fill one spray bottle with vinegar and one with undiluted 3 percent hydrogen peroxide. Spray surfaces with one bottle, then the other (it doesn't matter which is first). When hydrogen peroxide has stopped fizzing, its work is done; no need to rinse. If you're storing hydrogen peroxide in a spray bottle, make sure it is dark colored, as light damages its structure.

Vinegar Tricks

Vinegar is a whiz at cutting through grease and grime. Try these easy cleaning tricks:

- To remove mildew, apply pure vinegar, let sit for 30 minutes or more, and scrub if necessary.

- To get a sparkling toilet, pour 1 cup vinegar in and let sit for several hours. Scrub rings away with a toilet brush.
- To remove baked-on grease in the microwave, bring ½ cup vinegar and ½ cup water to a rolling boil in the microwave. Baked-on food will loosen to be wiped away easily.
- Greasy, baked-on gunk on your stovetop? Set a vinegar-soaked sponge on the area for up to an hour. Wipe away easily.

Baking soda: Scrubbing, Deodorizing

A natural mineral, baking soda (or sodium bicarbonate) is an effective degreaser that can help remove odors and acts as a scrubbing agent. Along with helping baked goods rise, baking soda can help relieve indigestion, whiten teeth, exfoliate skin, relieve sunburn and more. For household purposes, baking soda's scouring abilities help it remove stains and grime and dissolve grease.

Most Basic Baking Soda Scrub

1 cup baking soda
Enough water to make a paste

Use to scour greasy pots, scrub the bathtub or sink, or treat grease stains on clothing. Store remainder in a lidded jar.

Cookie Sheet Scrub

1/4 cup baking soda
Enough hydrogen peroxide make a paste

In glass bowl place soda and put in hydrogen peroxide to make a nice past. Rub on offending dirt/stand/grease. You can use your fingers, or sponge, just rub until offending items is off.

Add Liquid Soap

Add liquid soap for suds and extra cleaning power. We recommend an olive oil-based soap, also known as castile soap. Some common brands include Dr. Bronner's and Kirk's Natural.

Add Coarse Salt

Add coarse salt for extra scrubbing power. Salt acts as an abrasive, letting you use a little less elbow grease. A paste of baking soda, coarse salt and water is particularly effective at cleaning the bathtub or white sinks.

Simple Washing Powder

16 cups baking soda

12 cups borax

*8 cups grated castile or glycerin soap flakes**

3 tablespoons lavender, lemon or grapefruit essential oil

Combine baking soda, borax and soap flakes. Add essential oil and mix with a wire whisk. Use 1/8 cup per load.

Yield: This recipe makes enough powder to last a family of four one year.

**Try [Sun Feather Natural Soap Company](#) , or buy bars of castile soap (e.g. Dr. Bronner's) and grate with a kitchen grater.*

Pre-Wash Stain Spray

1/2 cup white vinegar

1/4 cup baking soda

3 cups water

Stir together and fill a labeled spray bottle. Spray on soiled spots just before washing.

Always test a hidden spot first.

Stain Remover

This recipe works great on whites. Used on colored and dark. Noticed a little brighter shade when I looked where I treated. Once I looked away, I did not notice and difference. (Tried 6/23/13).

You need to create a fresh batch each time for the chemical reaction to be it's strongest.

Ingredients:

1/2 part baking soda

1 part Dawn dish washing liquid

2 parts Hydrogen Peroxide

1. Combine ingredients in a small glass bowl.

2. Using a old toothbrush brush scrub in circular motions the stain.

3. Let the mixture do it's magic for at least an hour, longer on old stains.

Bleach/Brightener Substitute

1 cup hydrogen peroxide

1/4 cup lemon or grapefruit juice

12 cups water

Store in a labeled plastic jug. Add 2 cups per load along with detergent.

Extra tips:

For extra-clean clothes, follow your detergent with ½ cup of borax, an all-natural laundry booster. Add baking soda to wash water at the same time as detergent to soften and freshen clothes and linens.

Jewelry Cleaner

1 tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon baking soda

1 tablespoon dish detergent

1 cup water

1 piece aluminum foil

Heat water in the microwave for 1 or 2 minutes. Cut a piece of aluminum foil that roughly covers the bottom of a small bowl (like a cereal bowl).

Pour hot water into bowl. Place salt, soda, and dishwashing liquid into bowl. Place jewelry on top of foil and let it sit for 5 to 10 minutes. Rinse jewelry in cool water and dry jewelry completely with soft cloth. Discard solution after use and make a new batch next time.

According to wire-sculpture.com, "this works well for gold-filled, brass, german (nickel) silver, and sterling silver. I have even cleaned jewelry with freshwater pearls, shell cameos and mother of pearl with no problem."

Nasal Spray

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1 cup water

Mix together and squeeze a little into a bulb syringe and squirt up the nose, then suck it back out.

Bone Meal for Plant Fertilizer

For a good plant fertilizer, dry eggshells in the oven, then pulverize them in a blender to make bone meal.

13 WAYS TO USE BAKING SODA AROUND THE HOUSE

By Susan Melgren

Use baking soda to absorb odors, soothe sunburns, clean hair, put out grease fires and more.

Commonly kept in the refrigerator to absorb unpleasant odors, baking soda is a staple in almost every home—and one with a bevy of uses. A weak alkaline, baking soda can neutralize acids, break down proteins and restore pH balance, which can be useful in everything from cleaning and deodorizing to soothing skin ailments. Put baking soda to good use with these practical ideas.

1. Odor Absorber: One of baking soda's best-known properties is its ability to neutralize odors. Sprinkle some at the bottom of trashcan liners. For carpet odors, sprinkle baking soda over carpet and let sit for 30 minutes to overnight, then vacuum.

2. Food De-Gunker: Easily remove caked-on food from pots and pans by soaking them in baking soda. Just sprinkle a liberal amount on tough spots, add water, let soak for 30 minutes to an hour, then scrub off. For extra power, add a few drops of white vinegar to the mix.

3. Laundry Booster: Add ½ cup baking soda to the wash cycle to enhance the effectiveness of detergent, absorb odors and help remove stains from clothing.

4. Silverware Sparkler: To clean silverware en masse, line a large glass baking pan with foil, then add silverware, making sure each piece touches foil. (Combined, heat, baking soda and aluminum create a chemical reaction that reverses the process that leads to silver tarnish.) Evenly distribute ½ cup baking soda over silverware, then completely immerse in boiling water. Let soak for five minutes, rinse (carefully—the water may still be hot!) and dry. You can also create a polishing paste by combining 1 cup baking soda with ¼ cup water; rub the paste over silverware using a damp cloth, then dry.

5. Natural Dentifrice: Make a tooth-cleaning powder by mixing three parts baking soda with one part salt. For flavor, add cinnamon sticks, cloves, citrus peels, a vanilla bean or dried mint leaves. Store in a lidded glass jar for a day or two to allow the aroma to permeate the mix, then transfer to a shaker for sprinkling on your toothbrush.

6. Dental Appliance Cleaner: Dissolve 2 teaspoons baking soda in warm water, then let dentures, retainers, mouth guards and other oral appliances soak. Or dip a toothbrush in baking soda and scrub.

7. Shampoo Booster: Shampoos, conditioners and other hair products can leave behind buildup. Mixing a teaspoon of baking soda into your shampoo bottle can help reduce buildup and make your hair more manageable.

8. Comb Cleaner: Remove natural oil buildup from hairbrushes and combs by soaking them in a solution of 1 teaspoon baking soda combined with water.

9. Sting Soother: Bee sting? Because of its alkaline properties, baking soda can help neutralize formic acid in bee stings. Mix baking soda with a little water to create a paste; apply to the sting.

10. Sunburn Reliever: Soothe sunburned skin with a baking soda bath. Baking soda can cool the skin while helping it retain moisture. Add 1 cup baking soda to a tub of cool or tepid water; stir to dissolve clumps, then soak for 15 minutes or more.

11. Antacid Alternative: Thanks to its alkaline properties, baking soda can neutralize acid reflux. Treat heartburn and indigestion by mixing 1 teaspoon baking soda into a glass of water. This simple remedy also works well for ulcer pain.

12. Flower Freshener: Keep cut flowers alive longer by adding a teaspoon of baking soda to the vase water.

13. Fire Control: Keep baking soda close to the stove in case of grease fires. Water encourages grease fires to spread. Instead, smother it with baking soda. Heated baking soda releases carbon dioxide, eating the oxygen fires need for fuel.

USING SALT

by Melissa Breyer

How many ways can you use salt? According to the Salt Institute, about 14,000! I can't think of another more versatile mineral. The use of salt to preserve food was one of the early cornerstones of civilization (preservation lessened the dependence on seasonal food, and provided sustenance for traveling over long distances). However, salt was very difficult to obtain. With modern production methods, nowadays salt is the most common and readily available nonmetallic mineral in the world; in fact, the supply of salt is inexhaustible.

Since at least medieval times salt (sodium chloride) has been used for cleaning—and ensuing generations have continued to rely on it for all kinds of nifty tricks around the house. (these were the days before toxic chemicals promised the convenience of an easy fix!) So with its non-toxic friendliness and top-dog status as an endlessly abundant resource, let's jump on the granny bandwagon and swap out some non-toxic solutions for ample, innocuous and inexpensive salt.

But first, let my inner science geek pipe in for just a second (although if I eat dinner with you, I promise not to ask you to please pass the sodium chloride). There is a whole class of chemical compounds called "salts," but the salt we're talking about is good old sodium chloride—an ionic compound with the formula NaCl. Sodium chloride is the salt most responsible for the salinity of the oceans and of the extracellular fluid of many multicellular organisms (which is why it is vital for us), and the major ingredient in edible salt.

There are a number of forms of salt produced for consumption (and by default, housekeeping!): unrefined salt (such as sea salt), refined salt (table salt), and iodized salt. The best salts for consumption are the most unrefined salts like sea salt and himalayan salt which are the highest in organic minerals. But for cleaning purposes you can use any type of salt. In case you're wondering Epsom salt is an entirely different animal: magnesium sulfate to be exact (which is a salt that I consider to be, essentially, miraculous).

Okay, lab coat off, Hints-from-Heloise hat on. Here are just a few of the many ways you can put salt to good use in your home:

Cleaning

Salt works as an effective yet gentle scouring agent. Salt also serves as a catalyst for other ingredients, such as vinegar, to boost cleaning and deodorizing action. For a basic soft scrub, make a paste with lots of salt, baking soda and dish soap and use on appliances, enamel, porcelain, etc.

Clean sink drains.

Pour salt mixed with hot water down the kitchen sink regularly to deodorize and keep grease from building up.

Remove water rings.

Gently rub a thin paste of salt and vegetable oil on the white marks caused by beverage glasses and hot dishes, on wooden tables.

Clean greasy pans.

Cast-iron skillets can be cleaned with a good sprinkling of salt and paper towels.

Clean stained cups.

Mix salt with a dab of dish soap to make a soft scrub for stubborn coffee and tea stains.

Clean refrigerators.

A mix of salt and soda water can be used to wipe out and deodorize the inside of your refrigerator, a nice way to keep chemical-y cleaners away from your food.

Clean brass or copper.

Mix equal parts of salt, flour and vinegar to make a paste, and rub the paste on the metal. After letting it sit for an hour, clean with a soft cloth or brush and buff with a dry cloth.

Clean rust.

Mix salt and cream of tartar with just enough water to make a paste. Rub on rust, let dry, brush off and buff with a dry, soft cloth. You can also use the same method with a mix of salt and lemon.

Clean a glass coffee pot.

Every diner waitress' favorite tip: add salt and ice cubes to a coffee pot, swirl around vigorously, and rinse. The salt scours the bottom, and the ice helps to agitate it more for a better scrub.

Attack wine spills.

If your tipsy aunt tips her wine on the cotton or linen tablecloth, blot up as much as possible and immediately cover the wine with a pile of salt, which will help pull the remaining wine away from the fiber. After dinner, soak the tablecloth in cold water for thirty minutes before laundering. (Also works on clothing.)

Quell oversudsing.

Since of course we are all very careful in how much detergent we use in our laundry, we never have too many suds. But if...you can eliminate excess suds with a sprinkle of salt.

Dry clothes in the winter.

Use salt in the final laundry rinse to prevent clothes from freezing if you use an outdoor clothes line in the winter.

Brighten colors.

Wash colored curtains or washable fiber rugs in a saltwater solution to brighten the colors. Brighten faded rugs and carpets by rubbing them briskly with a cloth that has been dipped in a strong saltwater solution and wrung out.

Remove perspiration stains.

Add four tablespoons of salt to one quart of hot water and sponge the fabric with the solution until stains fade.

Remove blood stains.

Soak the stained cloth in cold saltwater, then launder in warm, soapy water and boil after the wash. (Use only on cotton, linen or other natural fibers that can take high heat.)

Tackle mildew or rust stains.

Moisten stained spots with a mixture of lemon juice and salt, then spread the item in the sun for bleaching—then rinse and dry.

Clean a gunky iron bottom.

Sprinkle a little salt on a piece of paper and run the hot iron over it to remove rough, sticky spots.

Set color.

Salt is used commonly in the textile industry, but works at home too. If a dye isn't colorfast, soak the garment for an hour in 1/2 gallon of water to which you've added 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/2 cup salt, then rinse. If rinse water has any color in it, repeat. Use only on single-colored fabric or madras. If the item is multicolored, dry-clean it to avoid running all of the colors together.

Around The House**Deter ants.**

Sprinkle salt at doorways, window sills and anywhere else ants sneak into your house. Ants don't like to walk on salt. You can also spray vinegar straight around the door frame and it keeps ants out. Once you mop the area, you will need to reapply the vinegar. (Have been doing all summer 2013 and it is keeping the ants out of my house.)

Extinguish grease fires.

Keep a box of salt near your stove and oven, and if a grease fire flares up, douse the flames with salt. (Never use water on grease fires; it will splatter the burning grease.) When salt is applied to fire, it acts like a heat sink and dissipates the heat from the fire—it also forms an oxygen-excluding crust to smother the fire.

Drip-proof candles.

If you soak new candles in a strong salt solution for a few hours, then dry them well, they will not drip as much when you burn them.

Keep cut flowers fresh.

A dash of salt added to the water in a flower vase will keep cut flowers fresh longer. (You can also try an aspirin or a dash of sugar for the same effect.)

Arrange artificial flowers.

Artificial flowers can be held in place by pouring salt into the vase, adding a little cold water and then arranging the flowers. The salt becomes solid as it dries and holds the flowers in place.

Make play dough.

Use 1 cup flour, 1/2 cup salt, 1 cup water, 2 tablespoons oil and 2 tablespoons cream of tartar. Stir together flour, cream of tartar, salt and oil, and slowly add water. Cook over medium heat stirring frequently until dough becomes stiff. Spread onto wax paper and let cool. Knead the dough with your hands until it reaches a good play dough consistency. (Read about juice dyes here.)

Repair walls.

To fill nail holes, fix chips or other small dings in white sheetrock or plaster walls, mix 2 tablespoons salt and 2 tablespoons cornstarch, then add enough water (about 5 teaspoons) to make a thick paste. Use the paste to fill the holes.

Deter patio weeds.

If weeds or grass grow between bricks or blocks in your patio, sidewalk or driveway, carefully spread salt between the cracks, then sprinkle with water or wait for rain to wet it down.

Kill poison ivy.

Mix three pounds of salt with a gallon of soapy water (use a gentle dish soap) and apply to leaves and stems with a sprayer, avoiding any plant life that you want to keep.

De-ice sidewalks and driveways.

One of the oldest tricks in the book! Lightly sprinkle rock salt on walks and driveways to keep snow and ice from bonding to the pavement and allow for easier shoveling/scraping. But don't overdo it; use the salt sensibly to avoid damage to plants and paws.

Tame a wild barbeque.

Toss a bit of salt on flames from food dripping in barbecue grills to reduce the flames and calm the smoke without cooling the coals (like water does).

Personal Care

Extend toothbrush life.

Soak toothbrushes in salt water before your first use; they'll last longer

Clean teeth.

Use one part fine salt to two parts baking soda—dip your toothbrush in the mix and brush as usual. You can also use the same mix dissolved in water for orthodontic appliances.

Rinse your mouth.

Mix equal parts salt and baking soda in water for a fresh and deodorizing mouth rinse.

Ease mouth problems.

For cankers, abscesses and other mouth sores, rinse your mouth with a weak solution of warm salt water several times a day.

Relieve bee sting pain.

Ouch? Immediately dampen area and pack on a small pile of salt to reduce pain and swelling. More bee-sting tips [here](#).

Treat mosquito bites.

A saltwater soak can do wonders for that special mosquito-bite itch—a poultice of salt mixed with olive oil can help too.

Treat poison ivy.

Same method as for treating mosquito bites. (Salt doesn't seem to distinguish between itches.)

Have an exfoliating massage.

After bathing and while still wet give yourself a massage with dry salt. It freshens skin and boosts circulation.

Ease throat pain.

Mix salt and warm water, gargle to relieve a sore throat.

66 ALL NATURAL CLEANING AIDS/ITEMS

Lemons

The acid in lemon juice removes dirt and rust stains. It's especially effective when mixed with salt, which makes "an excellent scouring paste," says Karyn Siegel-Maier, author of *The Naturally Clean Home* (Storey Publishing, \$13, amazon.com).

Price: About 50 cents a lemon.

Use Them to Clean Your...

Countertops:

Dip the cut side of a lemon half in baking soda to tackle countertops; wipe with a wet sponge and dry. Don't use on delicate stone, like marble, or stainless steel (it may discolor).

Cutting boards:

To remove tough food stains from light wood and plastic cutting boards, slice a lemon in half, squeeze onto the soiled surface, rub, and let sit for 20 minutes before rinsing.

Dishes:

To increase the grease-cutting power of your dishwashing detergent, add a teaspoon of lemon juice.

Faucets:

Combat lime scale by rubbing lemon juice onto the taps and letting it sit overnight. Wipe with a damp cloth.

Garbage disposal:

Cut a lemon in half, then run both pieces through the disposal. "The lemon cleans it and makes it smell great," says Linda Mason Hunter, a coauthor of *Green Clean* (Melcher Media, \$17, amazon.com).

Grout:

Spilled morning coffee on your tile countertop or backsplash? Here's how to tackle grout stains: Add lemon juice to 1 or 2 teaspoons cream of tartar (an acidic salt that acts as a natural bleaching agent) to make a paste. Apply with a toothbrush, then rinse.

Hands:

When you touch raw fish, the smell can linger on your fingers. Rub your hands with lemon juice, which will neutralize the odor.

Laundry:

To brighten whites, add 1/2 cup lemon juice to the rinse cycle for a normal-size load.

Plastic food-storage containers:

To bleach stains from tomato soup and other acidic foods on dishwasher-safe items, rub lemon juice on the spots, let dry in a sunny place, then wash as usual.

Essential Oils

Extracted from plants, some essential oils can kill bacteria and mold. They're very strong, so don't go overboard: One drop of peppermint oil is as potent as 30 cups of peppermint tea.

Price: \$14 for 5 milliliters at health-food stores.

Use Them to Clean Your...**Combs and brushes:**

Fill a container with 1 1/2 cups water, 1/2 cup distilled white vinegar, and 20 drops tea-tree, lavender, or eucalyptus oil. Soak combs and brushes for 20 minutes. Rinse and air-dry.

Scuffed floors:

Apply two to four drops of tea-tree oil to the spots. Wipe excess oil with a cloth and rub in distilled white vinegar.

Gum-encrusted items:

Orange oil is great at removing this sticky offender from various materials. (Don't worry: It shouldn't stain fabrics. But do launder immediately.) Apply with a cotton ball.

Shower doors:

Wipe scum-covered glass doors with a few drops of lemon oil twice a month. It will protect them from grime buildup.

Toilets:

Add 2 teaspoons tea-tree oil and 2 cups water to a spray bottle. Shake, then spritz along the toilet's inside rim. Let sit for 30 minutes; scrub. You can also place a few drops of your favorite oil on the inside of the toilet-paper tube. "Every time the paper is used, the scent will be released," says Siegel-Maier.

Windows:

Mix 2 ounces water and 10 drops lavender or lemongrass oil to wipe grime off windows. Bonus: These oils may repel flies.

Liquid Castile Soap

Like other soaps, this plant-based version efficiently loosens grime and dirt from surfaces, says Siegel-Maier: "But it's gentler, so it won't dull them."

Price: About \$8 for 8 ounces at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Car:

Mix 1/4 cup liquid Castile soap with hot water in a bucket (fill almost to the top). Rub a generous amount of the solution on your car's exterior, windshield, hubcaps, and tires with a large sponge, then thoroughly hose it off.

Floors:

You can mop almost any type of floor with a solution of 1/4 cup liquid Castile soap and 2 gallons warm water. If the floors are greasy, add 1/4 cup distilled white vinegar to the bucket. leather upholstery: Add 2 drops liquid Castile soap to 1 quart warm water. Apply to the leather with a barely moist sponge.

Marble countertops:

Stir 1 tablespoon liquid Castile soap into 1 quart warm water. Dampen a cloth with the solution and wipe surface. Rinse, then dry with a clean cloth.

Sinks, showers, tubs, and ceramic tile:

Create a homemade soft scrubber by combining 1 tablespoon liquid Castile soap and 1/3 cup baking soda.

Stovetop and vent hood:

Add a few squirts of liquid Castile soap to 2 cups hot water. Apply to the stovetop, the burners, and the vent hood to cut through accumulated grease.

Cooking Oils

Vegetable- and plant-based oils, such as olive and sunflower, dislodge dirt, diminish scratches and imperfections, and "hydrate wood that has aged or dried out from exposure to the sun," says Hunter.

Price: About \$7 a pint at supermarkets.

Use Them to Clean Your...**Cast-iron pans:**

Make a scrubbing paste with vegetable oil and a teaspoon of coarse salt to combat cooked-on debris, then rinse with hot water.

Hands:

To get paint off your skin, rub with vegetable oil, then wash thoroughly with soap.

Leather shoes:

Wipe away dirt with a damp sponge, then apply a drop of vegetable oil to a soft cloth and rub the surface to remove scuff marks. Buff the shoes with a chamois to a shine.

Rattan and wicker furniture:

To prevent rattan and wicker from drying or cracking, lightly brush them with vegetable or sunflower oil and gently rub in with a cloth. Warm the oil on the stove first to thin it and make it easier to apply.

Stainless-steel surfaces:

For extra sparkle, pour olive oil onto a cloth and buff.

Wood furniture:

Make your own polish by mixing 2 cups olive or vegetable oil with the juice of 1 lemon; work it in with a soft cloth. To smooth out scratches in light-colored wood, rub them with a solution of equal parts olive or vegetable oil and lemon juice.

Borax

When added to a laundry wash, borax makes detergents even more effective. It's also "quite alkaline, so it kills mold and fungus and softens water," says Robert Wolke, Ph.D., author of *What Einstein Told His Cook: Kitchen Science Explained* (W. W. Norton & Company, \$16, amazon.com).

Price: About \$5 for 4 pounds at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Baseboards, countertops, and walls:

Dissolve 1/2 cup borax in 1 gallon hot water and pour the solution into a spray bottle (which you can store for later use). Spritz generously, wipe down with a damp cloth, and let air-dry.

China (including hand painted):

Soak china in a dishpan filled with warm water and 1/2 cup borax; rinse well.

Dishwasher:

If the machine is smelling like last night's chicken cacciatore, sprinkle borax in the bottom, let it sit overnight, then wipe down with a damp sponge. No need to rinse; just run the next load.

Pots and pans:

Rub borax into cookware with a damp sponge; rinse well.

Toilet:

Pour borax in the bowl and let it sit overnight, says Annie Bond, author of *Better Basics for the Home* (Three Rivers Press, \$19, amazon.com). Swish the bowl a few times with a toilet brush and flush the next day. "Borax really gets rid of rust stains," she says.

Vinegar

This acidic wonder can wipe out tarnish, soap scum, mineral deposits, and more. Among natural cleaners, it's the clear champ. Distilled white vinegar creates an environment that inhibits the growth of mold, mildew, and some bacteria, such as E. coli and salmonella, says Jeffrey Hollender, author of *Naturally Clean* (New Society Publishers, \$18, amazon.com).

Price: About \$1.80 for a quart at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Coffeemaker:

Pour equal parts vinegar and water into the machine's water chamber, then switch on the brew cycle. Halfway through, turn off the coffeemaker and let the solution sit for about an hour. Turn it on again to complete the cycle, then run several cycles with clean water.

Dishwasher:

To disinfect the interior of the machine, pour 1/2 cup vinegar into the reservoir and run an empty cycle, says Hunter. Or place a small bowl filled with vinegar on the bottom rack and run an empty cycle.

Drains:

Clean drains—and the pipes they're attached to—by pouring vinegar down them. After 30 minutes, flush with cold water.

Floors:

Add 1/4 cup vinegar to a bucket of warm water to clean almost any type of floor except marble (vinegar can scratch it) or wood (vinegar can strip it).

Glassware:

For spotless hand-washed glasses, add 1 cup vinegar to the rinse water.

Moldy walls:

Spray vinegar on the affected areas. After about 15 minutes, rinse and let dry thoroughly.

Showerheads:

To combat mineral deposits, pour vinegar into a plastic grocery bag and knot the handles over the neck of the showerhead, securing with rubber bands. Let soak overnight. Rinse with water in the morning.

Steam iron:

To get rid of mineral deposits, fill the iron with equal parts vinegar and water; press the steam button. Turn off, let cool, empty, and rinse.

Windows:

Mix 1/4 cup vinegar, 2 cups water, and a squirt of liquid Castile soap in a spray bottle. Spritz windows and wipe with a sheet of newspaper.

Baking and Washing Soda

Baking soda (a.k.a. sodium bicarbonate) and its close cousin, washing soda (sodium carbonate), both absorb odors. But unlike baking soda, slightly stronger washing soda can't be ingested; wear rubber gloves when handling it.

Price: About \$1.08 for a pound of baking soda; \$7 for 4 pounds of washing soda; both available at supermarkets.

Use Them to Clean Your...

Can opener:

Dip a toothbrush in a paste of 2 tablespoons baking soda and 1 teaspoon water and use it to dislodge gunk.

Garage floors (and other concrete surfaces):

Pour washing soda generously on oil and grease spots and sprinkle with water until a paste forms. Let stand overnight. The next day, scrub with a damp brush, hose down, and wipe clean.

Garden tools:

Dip a moist stiff-bristled brush in washing soda to scrub trimmers, clippers, and more. Rinse, then place in a sunny area to dry. (Don't use washing soda on aluminum tools.)

Grills and barbecue utensils:

To combat tough grease stains, dip a moist stiff-bristled brush in washing soda and scrub away.

Stove burner grates:

In a dishpan, soak them in 1 gallon warm water and 1/2 cup washing soda for 30 minutes. Rinse and dry.

Stained teacups and coffee mugs:

Fill with 1 part baking soda and 2 parts water and soak overnight; rub with a sponge and rinse.

Upholstered furniture:

To remove odors, sprinkle baking soda on the fabric, then vacuum.

Scuffed walls:

Erase crayon marks by applying a baking-soda paste (equal parts baking soda and water) to white painted walls (baking soda may dull colored walls). Let dry before brushing it off with a clean cloth.

Toothpaste

The combination of a mild abrasive, a surfactant (detergent), and an antibacterial agent makes toothpaste a potent stain-fighter. "Stick with standard paste, not gel, and steer clear of formulas designed for tartar control and whitening," says Siegel-Maier. "These often contain chemicals and additional abrasives that can damage items such as fine silver."

Price: About \$3.65 for a tube.

Use It to Clean Your...

Acrylic accessories (such as desktop organizers):

Squeeze toothpaste onto a toothbrush and work it into scratches until they diminish. Wipe residue off with a cloth.

Chrome fixtures:

To polish faucets and taps in the kitchen or bathroom, smear a dime-size amount of toothpaste

onto them, then buff with a soft cloth until they shine.

Scuffed linoleum:

Reduce marks by scrubbing them with toothpaste and a dry cloth until no toothpaste residue remains.

Piano keys:

Rub each key carefully with a damp cotton swab and a dollop of toothpaste. Wipe dry and buff with a clean cloth.

Tarnished silverware:

Put a dab of toothpaste on a soft cloth, rub it onto the tarnish, then rinse with water and dry with a clean cloth.

Steam iron:

Mineral deposits can stain an iron's soleplate. Apply a dab of toothpaste and work it into the plate. Use a clean cloth to remove residue.

Table Salt

Salt's granular texture makes it perfectly suited for scouring. Table salt, sea salt, and kosher salt can all be used, but table salt is the cheapest choice.

Price: About 69 cents a pound.

Use It to Clean Your...

Artificial flowers:

Place the fake blooms inside a paper bag and pour in salt. Close the bag and shake vigorously. The salt will dislodge accumulated dust and dirt.

Glassware:

Salt won't scratch the way a scouring pad can. To get out stubborn stains, add some salt for extra abrasion and scrub.

Greasy pots and pans:

Sprinkle salt on cookware to absorb excess grease. Dump out the salt before washing as usual. (Not recommended for nonstick cookware.)

Spills in the oven:

If that casserole bubbles over as you take it out of the oven, pour salt on the spill to soak it up. When the oven is cool, wipe with a damp sponge.

Stained teacups and coffee mugs:

Sprinkle salt on the outside of a lemon peel; rub the affected area till clean.

Wooden counters and tables:

Cover grease splatters with salt to absorb as much as possible. Wait an hour, then brush away the salt.

Un-shop: Conserving, not Consuming

When we do have a need, perhaps a set of jeans or a microwave, why not see if someone already has what you need for free in your community? It's easy, thanks to freecycle.org, craigslist.org and a growing number of local gift or barter exchanges. What's in common with all these forms is a transfer to goods (and in some cases services) without the use of money. Individual self-interest is trumped by community interest. So let's start taking care of our community.

Power the renewable energy revolution

Times couldn't be better for installing your own renewable energy system or improving your energy efficiency of your home or business (or both!), depending on the state you live in. The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 extended the Energy Policy Act of 2005. These new acts extend and expand the federal tax credits available for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements made in 2009 and beyond. There are numerous renewable energy cash-back incentives, tax credits and low interest loans that can help ease the transition from a fossil-fuel based economy to one that thrives on solar income. Check out the [Database for State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency](#) to see what's available in your state.

Shine Floors with White Vinegar

For wood floors, contractor Stephen Fanuka says, "You want to get a nice clean shine on a wood floor? Get yourself a bucket and mix nine parts warm water to one part white vinegar. This is a cheap trick I learned from an 80-year-old cleaning lady who used to make my wood floors look dazzling."

Use Baking Soda to Mop Up Tile

To clean tile floors or a backsplash, Marty Hoffman of Hoffman Brothers Floors suggests mixing baking soda and water together as a homemade cleaner. Pour half a cup of baking soda into two gallons

Remove Stone Countertop Stains with Hydrogen Peroxide

You can remove most coffee or juice stains with a little hydrogen peroxide in water, plus a few drops of ammonia, according to kitchen designer Florence Perchuk. For everyday wear and tear of your stone countertops, buff away small scratches with superfine dry steel wool called "grade 0000."

Wipe Away Wall Splatters

There are basically two kinds of stains on painted walls: oil- and waterborne. Benjamin Moore's Carl Minchew suggests taking a wet cloth or paper towel to the waterborne ones — wine, Jell-O, ketchup, mustard, even smashed mosquitoes. For oily stains — cooking grease or crayon — try using a little mild dishwashing soap mixed in with water, and then rinsing with water.

Fade Stainless-Steel Scratches with Steel Wool

To minimize a scratch on stainless steel, Adam Kamens of Amuneal Manufacturing Corp. says to try steel wool. Rub it gently in line with the grain until marks disappear. Afterwards, you can try spraying a wax-based aerosol spray, like Ball's Stainless Steel Cleaner/Polish.

Try Ketchup to Remove Tarnish

To remove tarnish from copper and brass fixtures, pots, and pans, give ketchup a shot. Dab some onto a soft cloth and gently rub. Finish by rinsing with warm water.

CAST IRON SKILLET CARE

The Cure

Step 1

You'll need:

- A scouring pad or wire brush
- Natural dish soap

New cast-iron cookware comes with a coating, either shellac or wax, that you must remove before curing. A scouring pad or wire brush and warm water with a little dishwashing soap will get the job done. Once the coating is removed, you should never again let soap touch the iron. Let's repeat that. Do not use soap on seasoned cast iron. The cure (seasoning) is based on grease, and soap's job is to remove grease. So if you wash your iron with soap, you'll destroy the very effect you are aiming for.

Step 2

You'll need:

- Olive oil

Cover the pan's surface, inside and out, with a liberal coating of oil. Put the pan in a cool oven. Turn the oven to 300. The pan should remain in the oven during preheat, then an additional 30 minutes. For extra insurance (against burns, too), let the pan cool inside the oven once you've turned it off.

Care and feeding for your skillet

Clean gently. Properly treated, your pan will never be bright and shiny. Over-scrubbing ruins the cooking surface. Gently remove food particles with a scouring pad, then rinse with water. Soaking it could remove its protective surface. Always dry immediately. Never clean cast iron in the dishwasher.

Keep it dry. Cast iron's nonstick surface can be damaged by frequent exposure to water. Even making soup a few times can remove the coating. The best practice is to cook with dry ingredients or fry between liquid cooking. If you lose your coating, re-season the pot following the directions at left.

Cool down slowly. Never hasten the cooling process by exposing a hot pan to cool water. It can damage or crack the surface.

Watch it improve with age. Chefs and foodies often brag about their decades-old or inherited cast-iron pans. Thrift shops and garage sales are often good sources for similar vintage finds. If it's a little rusty, just scour well and re-season.

Refurbish Your Finish

- While maintaining the seasoning should keep your Cast Iron and Carbon Steel in good condition, at some point you may need to re-season your cookware. If food sticks to the surface, or you notice a dull, gray color, repeat the seasoning process:
- Wash the cookware with hot, soapy water and a stiff brush. (It is okay to use soap this time because you are preparing to re-season the cookware).
- Rinse and dry completely.
- Apply a very thin, even coating of olive oil (or cooking oil of your choice) to the cookware inside and out. Too much oil will result in a sticky finish.
- Place aluminum foil on the bottom rack of the oven to catch any drips.
- Set oven temperature to 350 – 400 degrees F.
- Place cookware upside down on the top rack of the oven to prevent pooling.
- Bake the cookware for at least one hour. After the hour, turn the oven off and let the cookware cool in the oven.
- Store the cookware uncovered, in a dry place when cooled.
- Repeat as necessary.

HONE YOUR STONE: CLEAN YOUR COUNTERTOPS NATURALLY

By Ken Hoyt

Granite, marble and other natural stone surfaces offer durability and a sense of luxury, making them ubiquitous for countertop applications in upscale kitchens. Care for them with nontoxic cleansers and forgo the chemical sealants—the effort will go a long way toward making your kitchen more earth-friendly.

Most stone is porous, meaning that soil, food particles and liquids can penetrate the surface. Natural sealants can delay this, but none promise to prevent it completely. For daily maintenance, spray the surface with our simple Stone Cleaning Solution and wipe with a clean, soft cloth.

For spills, the best option is to wipe them up and use the solution as soon as possible. For really sticky messes, completely moisten a cloth with the solution, then microwave it for 20 seconds (or more) until the cloth is steaming hot. Use tongs to place the cloth directly on the stubborn spot. Soak until the grime is loosened.

If you've exhausted home remedies and the stain is persistent, call a professional stone installer for advice or a referral.

Stone Cleaning Solution

2 tablespoons biodegradable liquid soap
3 3/4 cups water
32-ounce spray bottle*

1. Pour soap and water into spray bottle.
2. Replace top and shake gently until completely combined. It will keep indefinitely.

* Reusing a bottle left over from another water-based solution is fine, but wash and rinse it thoroughly first.

Watch Out For...

ABRASION: Grit, sand, scouring powders and even china or porcelain dishes with unglazed bases can mar the sheen of stone. Be careful of not to set abrasive objects on your stone, and use a soft cloth or brush to wipe away grit before cleaning.

ACID: Vinegar, citrus juice, tomato products and other acids can permanently etch the surface. Wipe up the acid first, then wash the surface with clear water.

Call it a Patina

Everything wears a little with age—sterling silver and fine furniture acquire a tasteful glow after years of service and gentle polishing. Consider letting your stone surfaces age naturally. You'll end up with a look that has Old World elegance and is eco-friendly.

Seal it Up

Conventional wisdom favors maintaining a like-new appearance with a series of chemical treatments meant to seal and protect. You don't have to seal stone, but if you do, try [Safecoat MexeSeal](#), a water-based, low-odor alternative.

HOMEMADE PEST REPELLENT

Eliminate sources of moisture (such as leaky faucets) and food to keep bugs out of your house.

Perusing the chemical pest control options in the hardware store—the rows of bottles marked with “poison,” “toxic” and details on how to reach poison control hotlines—is enough to make living with ants look attractive. But you don’t have to live with toxins, ants or other pesky bugs. We can keep common household pests at bay using safe, natural strategies.

When it comes to warding off pests, your first step is to figure out what conditions in your home are attractive to them. Sources of water and food and good places to nest are magnets to pests who’d like to make your home their own. Assess your home, looking for places that seem appealing to bugs, then make it difficult for them to access those resources using our tips at right. If you have a problem with a specific bug, check out our natural tips below for troubleshooting pest problems.

Preventive Pest Control Measures

Wage Water War.

Available water (even very small amounts) is attractive to a wide range of irritating insects. Eliminate insects’ water supply by fixing any leaking fixtures, including faucets, pipes or clogged drains.

Block Food Supply.

The same premise is true for food around your home. Keep pests from setting up shop by being vigilant about crumbs and spills. Sweep the kitchen floor regularly, clear up any spills and wipe down counters daily. Store food in tightly sealed containers, and deposit leftovers promptly in the fridge. If you keep a covered sugar jar on the counter, place it on an interior wall to keep it away from insects.

Eliminate Clutter.

Excess stuff doesn’t just complicate life by getting in the way; it can also attract insects. Clear closets, the attic, the garage, the basement or any other area where unnecessary items accumulate. Recycle or donate old magazines, cardboard boxes and piles of old clothes. Store items you wish to keep in tightly sealed containers, especially items made of fabric or paper.

Secure the Perimeter.

Keep pests away by blocking their way into your home. Keep the screens on your doors and windows in good repair. Look for any holes or cracks in your building and make sure these disturbances are properly caulked and sealed.

Use a Nontoxic Repellent Regularly.

You can reap many benefits from cleaning with essential oils: Not only will your home be clean and smell wonderful, but several essential oils can also help repel pests. Whip up a natural, insect-repellent glass cleaner by combining 2 cups white vinegar with 10 drops sweet orange essential oil in a labeled spray bottle. Use it to clean windows and mirrors, shaking well before each use. You can also mix 1 gallon warm water, ¼ cup castile soap, 10 drops eucalyptus essential oil, 10 drops lavender essential oil and 1 drop vetiver essential oil (the vetiver is optional, as the scent is strong and distinct), then use it to wipe down floors.

Discover Homemade Pest Repellents

If preventive measures aren't enough to keep pests away, use the safe, nontoxic pest-specific repellents found in the article [Pest-Free, Naturally: Natural Pest Control](#).

PEST-FREE, NATURALLY: NATURAL PEST CONTROL

By Kim Erickson

Clove, cedar, vinegar and hot, soapy water can repel ants, flies and moths.

In many climates, warm weather brings bugs. While a few ants, fleas or silverfish can be a nuisance, an invasion may tempt you to reach for the bug spray. Don't do it! This heavy-handed approach can unleash toxic compounds that put your family's health at risk.

While highly toxic organophosphates are no longer allowed in home pesticides, popular pyrethrum-based pesticides aren't without risk. In animal studies, pyrethroid exposure affects the brain and nervous system; increases thyroid and liver cancers; damages male reproductive organs; and reduces testosterone levels and fertility. The Cancer Assessment Review Committee classified pyrethrins as "likely human carcinogens" if ingested.

Pyrethrins have sparked concern among environmentalists and lawmakers alike. Recently, Virginia Congressman Jim Moran and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry introduced legislation to explore the link between hormone-disrupting chemicals such as pyrethroids and the dramatic increase in autism, hyperactivity, diabetes, obesity, and breast and prostate cancer.

Pyrethrum-based pesticides aren't the only cause for concern. Propoxur, commonly found in ant and roach killers, depresses the central nervous system and respiratory tract, and overexposure can cause muscle weakness, dizziness, headaches and nausea. This noxious chemical also damages DNA and negatively affects fetal growth. The chemical N-octyl bicycloheptene dicarboximide—often found in ant and roach sprays, household foggers, and flea and tick repellents—is an excitotoxin that can depress the central nervous system, causing decreased heart rate, loss of consciousness and possibly death.

Infants and children, whose internal organs are still developing, are especially sensitive to the health risks these pesticides pose. Researchers have found that exposure to home pesticides and insecticides more than doubles a child's chances of developing neuroblastoma, a rare type of malignant brain tumor, and increases the risk of leukemia. An American Cancer Society study suggests children exposed to household insecticides are three to seven times more likely to develop non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Try these chemical-free alternatives to toxic pesticides.

Ants

Ants leave a scented trail so other ants can find their way to food. Routinely wash away these invisible trails with a vinegar-based cleanser made from 1/4 cup vinegar, 2 cups water and 10 to 15 drops of peppermint, clove, eucalyptus or tea tree essential oil. Keep ants out of your cupboards by sprinkling powdered cinnamon, paprika or cayenne pepper across their trails.

Fleas

The best strategy to kill fleas requires two steps: Bathe your pet in cedar oil shampoo and, at the same time, sprinkle flea-killing diatomaceous earth on all carpets. Brush it in and leave it for about four days, then thoroughly vacuum dead fleas from the carpet. Diatomaceous earth is harmless for pets and people, though it can be a mild skin irritant. If your pet is sensitive, keep it out of the area. During an infestation, repeat frequently to destroy hatching fleas.

Grain moths and weevils

Keep these tiny bugs away by placing a cinnamon stick or bay leaf in with your flour, pasta or grains. The strong-smelling spices will repel the insects without affecting the food's taste or smell.

House flies

Place sachets of crushed mint, bay leaf, clove or eucalyptus around the house to repel flies. You can also make your own flypaper. Mix 1/4 cup corn syrup, 1 tablespoon granulated sugar and 1 tablespoon brown sugar in a small bowl. Cut strips of brown kraft paper and soak in the sugar mixture. Let dry overnight. To hang, poke a small hole at the top of each strip and hang with string.

Moths

Commercial mothballs contain naphthalene, a hydrocarbon derived from coal tar. This toxin destroys red blood cells and has been detected in human breast milk. Cedar is a far safer option. Wrap cedar blocks or chips in cheesecloth and place in the drawer or cabinet alongside your clothes. Dried lemon peels are also a natural moth deterrent. Toss a handful into a clothes chest or tie some in cheesecloth and hang in the closet.

Silverfish

Silverfish prefer damp, warm conditions like those found around kitchen and bathroom plumbing. To remove them, vacuum the area to remove food particles and insect eggs, then dust with either diatomaceous earth or boric acid (do not use boric acid if you have pets). You can also trap silverfish in a small glass jar. Wrap the outside with tape so they can climb up and fall in. The silverfish will be trapped inside because they can't climb smooth surfaces.

Spiders

Take orange peels, grind them in a blender until they are of liquid consistency. Put one part of orange peels and 2 parts of water in spray bottle and spray. (From Connie Peterson.)

Resources

[EcoSMART](#)

natural insect repellents

[Farnam](#)

fly and mosquito controls

[Natural Ginesis](#)

natural insect repellents

[Safer Brand](#)

moth traps and other insect repellents

Plants That Repel Insects

By Tammie Painter

Mosquitoes can ruin the enjoyment of your summer garden. Ordinary insect repellents slather you and your family in sticky chemicals; bug zappers are annoying and leave you sitting amongst charred insect parts; and sometimes you aren't in the mood for the smoke of incense or candles in lieu of fresh summer air (but if you are, check out our [favorite product](#)).

So what's left? Mosquitoes don't like a few familiar herbs that you can use to stay bite-free this season. Keep the crushed leaves of these six plants in a small container at intervals on your patio to repel mosquitoes. Except for marigold and wormwood, which can cause contact dermatitis, you can rub the crushed leaves on your skin for added protection.

- **Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*).**

A perennial for some gardeners and an annual for others, catnip has been found to be 10 times more effective than DEET at keeping mosquitoes away. Cats will crush this plant if it is in a garden bed and it has a tendency to become invasive, but keeping a couple of plants in hanging containers helps avoid both problems.

- **Marigold (*Tagetes* spp.).**

This sun-loving annual also repels aphids and is an excellent companion plant for your vegetable garden. Marigolds are an easy-to-care-for border plant and the simplicity of collecting seeds for next year's planting makes this plant an affordable addition. Note: Do not rub on skin.

- **Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*).**

The oil of this shrub is heavenly to most humans, but disgusting to mosquitoes. It's an attractive plant for container or herb gardens that requires little water and also is delicious when used for cooking meat, soups and egg dishes.

- **Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*).**

This plant has a lemony scent that mosquitoes hate. With a little patience, it can be grown from stalks sold in the market. It prefers full sun and good drainage. Keep in mind that this tropical plant won't tolerate freezing temperatures.

- **Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*).**

This perennial has silvery foliage and can be grown in full sun in most zones. Makes a unique border plant and the pungent odor keeps mosquitoes at bay. Note: Do not rub on skin.

- **Mint (*Mentha* spp.).**

Many mints' oils are unpleasant to mosquitoes, so keep a pot or two of these hardy and aromatic plants around. Since they spread easily, mints are best cultivated in containers.

YOUR HOME'S 10 GERMIEST PLACES

Germs, bacteria and viruses are everywhere. Most are harmless, some cause runny noses, and 1 to 2 percent could lead to life-threatening infections. Our advice? Worry less, learn more. Once you know the 10 most common places germs linger in your home, you can take simple steps to eliminate them.

Sponges and rags.

When you wipe down a dish or counter, you're simply transferring bacteria from one place to another. Wash sponges and rags with soap and hot water between uses or replace these items often; wash your hands after touching sponges. Zapping a wet sponge in the microwave for four minutes will kill most disease-causing germs. The sponge will be hot, so be careful when removing it from the microwave.

Cutting boards.

Use caution if you cut different types of food on the same boards, salmonella, staph and E. coli are commonly transmitted this way. Don't chop vegetables or other ready-to-eat foods on a cutting board used to trim meat, poultry or fish. Wash boards thoroughly after each use. A good scrubbing with dish detergent and hot water will do the trick; you also can wipe the boards clean with undiluted white vinegar. Replace boards that become deeply scratched.

Kitchen surfaces.

Just because the countertop looks clean doesn't mean it is. Viruses and bacteria are invisible to the human eye. Spray down countertops with a solution of equal parts warm water and white vinegar and wipe dry using a soft cloth. Thoroughly clean the faucet, sink and knobs, too.

Doorknobs.

When you touch a doorknob, you touch the hand of everyone who was there before you. Wash your hands after touching a public doorknob, and regularly clean your own doorknobs with a nontoxic all-purpose cleaner (store-bought or homemade) diluted in hot water.

Toothbrushes.

Brushing transfers plaque, bacteria and more to your toothbrush. After each use, rinse the toothbrush with tap water and shake several times. Store upright to allow the toothbrush to air dry. Replace it every three months.

Shared phones.

Many cleaners are safe to use on electronic devices. Unplug or turn off the phone, then spray a cloth with all-purpose cleaner and wipe down the phone. Thoroughly clean the mouthpiece, the germiest part. Use a cotton swab dipped in isopropyl alcohol to clean the number buttons and the spaces between them.

Washers and dryers.

Because clothes are often laundered in cold or warm water and without bleach, germs can multiply in the washer. These germs are also transferred when clothes are moved into the dryer. To thoroughly clean the washer, start a warm wash cycle (with no clothes) and add 5 cups of white vinegar. Run the cycle as normal. Repeat every six months.

The remote.

Often used but rarely cleaned, this object can be full of germs, especially if you have kids. Dilute all-purpose cleaner or white vinegar in warm water, then wet a soft cloth with the solution. Wipe the remote, then dry with another soft cloth.

Shower curtains.

Bacteria and germs breed on vinyl, cloth and other curtains, and the constant influx of hot water doesn't help. Spray down vinyl curtains regularly with a solution of equal parts white vinegar and warm water; wash cloth curtains according to label instructions at least once a month.

The vacuum.

Vacuum brushes, bags and filters make great hiding places for germs like E. coli. Because food is sucked into the vacuum, bacteria can survive for a long time inside. Change the bags often, and remove the brushes and filters for a quick cleaning monthly. Clean the cavity of a bagless vacuum with all-purpose cleaner and let it air dry.

MAKE YOUR OWN PERFUME OIL AND POWDER

Since ancient times, scented body products have been used to seduce, entice, influence and heal. The queen of Sheba reportedly used aromatics to seduce King Solomon. Cleopatra used scents to influence the Greeks and Romans. People of many different cultures wore plant essences in an effort to prevent illness and plague. Even Napoleon enjoyed herbal scents; he reportedly used up to 60 bottles of rosemary cologne a month!

For me, making herbal perfumes, powders and oils is a way of capturing a little bit of my garden to be enjoyed later. Fragrance is the very heart and soul of my patch of herbs, and wearing that fragrance is a way of keeping my garden close throughout the day.

Even if you don't have a garden of your own, there are many ways to capture and wear herbal fragrances. Essential oils and a few ingredients found at the local supermarket can be combined to create delightful perfumes, powders and body sprays. You can use just one fragrance note at a time, such as lavender, rose or peppermint, or you can combine essential oils to create your personal signature fragrance.

The recipes here are very basic, but if you crave more information on perfumery, several books teach the fine art of blending natural perfumes. As you try the different recipes, remember that you always can experiment and substitute different oils to suit your taste. That's part of the fun.

Making your own fragrant products gives you great freedom of choice. Using the principles of aromatherapy, you can decide how you want your fragrances to affect you and those around you. For example, you may want to wear lavender for its calming, refreshing effects, sweet orange because it is uplifting, or rosemary for mental stimulation. However, you must use pure essential oils (distilled using water and steam) or absolutes (essences extracted with the use of a solvent such as alcohol) to reap these benefits. Synthetic fragrance oils do not offer the same results.

Some pure essential oils can be very expensive or hard to find. Attar of roses and oil of neroli can cost about \$200 per ounce. (You may choose to simply omit the neroli from the solid perfume recipe.) Other essences, such as vanilla, are hard to find in a pure absolute.

From such natural products, however, come superior fragrance and less chance of an allergic reaction. Expensive essential oils often are available in very small quantities, such as 1/16 ounce or 1/2 gram. These tiny amounts are perfectly adequate, however, because you only need a few drops per recipe(see sources on Page 30).

Fragrance Blend Recipes

A standard perfume — the kind you'd purchase at your favorite department store — usually contains about 15 to 30 percent aromatic oils diluted with alcohol and dispersants. A perfume oil uses a carrier oil rather than alcohol. The carrier oil shows the evaporation process, and the resulting mixture holds its fragrance longer than an average perfume.

Jojoba oil is an excellent carrier oil because it is actually a liquid wax. It does not go rancid as quickly as other oils. Jojoba oil has little or no fragrance of its own and is readily absorbed into the skin. Sweet almond oil and apricot kernel oil are good choices for the same reasons, but they have a shelf life of only three to five months. If you use one of these two oils, make small batches that can be used within that time frame.

Garden Delight Perfume Oil

MAKES ABOUT 1 TEASPOON

- 18 drops grapefruit essential oil
- 12 drops lavender essential oil
- 4 drops vanilla absolute
- 60 drops jojoba or sweet almond oil

In a 1/8-ounce glass container, combine grapefruit and lavender essential oils and vanilla absolute. Shake well and let mixture sit for at least 1 week before adding jojoba or sweet almond oil. Dab the oil on your pulse points to release scent. Store in a glass container (plastic will absorb some of the fragrance).

Orange Delight variation: Use 8 drops sweet orange essential oil and 16 drops bergamot essential oil instead of the grapefruits, lavender and vanilla.

Spring Rain Solid Perfume

Solid perfume is simple to make, travels well and has great staying power when worn. It looks similar to lip balm and can be stored in a metal lip balm canister, a recycled pillbox or a small jar. Just be sure not to accidentally use it on your lips. MAKES ABOUT 1 1/2 OUNCES

- 15 drops lavender essential oil
- 8 drops oak moss essential oil
- 5 drops neroli essential oil
- 4 drops rosemary essential oil
- 2 tablespoons jojoba or sweet almond oil
- 2 tablesp-oons grated beeswax or beeswax beads

In a small double boiler, heat all oils together until just warm. Stir well until completely blended. Stir in beeswax. Continue to stir until completely melted. Pour into small glass, metal or plastic containers. Let perfume cool completely. To use, rub finger over surface of perfume and then onto your pulse points or wherever you like to wear fragrance.

Lavender variation: Use 25 drops lavender essential oil instead of the others. The resulting perfume is very relaxing and especially soothing if you have a headache.

Rose Geranium Dusting Powder

Body powders are an inexpensive, yet luxurious way to wear alight fragrance. They are made up of just a few ingredients found in most grocery or health-food stores. A 50/50 ratio of rice flour to cornstarch produces a silky powder that does not cake up. The optional addition of arrowroot provides an extra softness to the mixture. Body powder can be stored in a shaker jar, canister or as mall box with a powder puff.

This recipe calls for fresh leaves of rose-scented geranium(*Pelargonium* spp.). If you do not have any scented pelargonium leaves, you may substitute the fresh petals of two very fragrant roses. For a minty refreshing powder, try substituting leaves of a peppermint-scented pelargonium (such as *P. tomentosum* or 'Peppermint Lace') and peppermint essential oil for the rose scents. Mints are cooling to wear on hot summer days. **MAKES 1 1/4 CUPS**

- 4 fresh rose-scented pelargonium leaves
- 1/2 cup white rice flour
- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 1/4 cup arrowroot powder (optional)
- 15 drops rose geranium oil
- 1 shaker jar or powder puff container

Use a paper towel to pat pelargonium leaves completely dry. Tear leaves into 1-inch pieces. Combine all ingredients in a glass jar.Cover and shake well. Set aside for one week. Sift out the geranium leaves and spoon powder into a glass shaker jar or other

container. Keep container closed between uses to preserve fragrance. Keep for up to 6 months.

Body Spritz

You can duplicate fancy herbal body sprays found in boutiques and bath shops at home for a fraction of the cost and make different scented spritzes to give away as gifts.

Spritzes work well with single fragrances such as bergamot, lavender, peppermint, rose geranium or spearmint. Or you can combine two oils such as lavender and bergamot, or vanilla and rose. A peppermint spritz, kept in the refrigerator, cools and provides a refreshing lift to tired skin at the end of the workday. **MAKES ABOUT 8 OUNCES**

- 1 cup distilled water
- 10 drops of your favorite essential oil

Pour ingredients into an 8-ounce glass or plastic spray bottle. Shake well; then spray on skin after a shower or any time you need to feel refreshed. Keeps for up to 6 months.

Safe Use of Essential Oils

Always dilute essential oils in a carrier oil (usually a vegetable oil such as olive, almond or jojoba) before applying them to your skin. Store essential oils in a dark, cool place, securely out of reach of children. Do not take them internally; some can cause serious health problems with ingestion of tiny amounts. Many citrus oils — especially lemon and bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*) — can increase skin's sensitivity to the sun, causing burns and/or dark spots. Avoid sun exposure when wearing them.

NATURAL SHAMPOO ALTERNATIVES: LATHER, RINSE, DO NOT REPEAT

By Gina DeBacker

Keep your hair healthy and beautiful by shampooing less often and checking out these natural shampoo alternatives.

We all want strong, shiny, beautiful hair. Healthy hair makes us look good and feel even better. If we listen to shampoo commercials, we might think washing our hair daily with store-bought shampoos and conditioners is the way to get the hair we want. But, while keeping our scalps clean and well-nourished is vital for good hair health, this common practice may be doing our tresses more harm than good.

According to a survey by Procter & Gamble, Americans lather up an average of 4.59 times a week, yet many hairstylists and dermatologists agree that's way too often. Hair is much like fine fibers in our wardrobes: The more we wash it, the more it shows signs of wear and tear. The longer and thicker your hair, the longer it can go in between washings. But even short, thin hair can skip a day without any treatment. Commercial shampoos strip the scalp of its natural oils, known as sebum. When these natural oils are constantly stripped, our oil glands compensate by producing even more oil—leaving hair feeling greasy and in need of another wash the very next day.

Water and harsh detergents make up nearly all of a conventional shampoo's formulation, with moisturizing emollients and plant extracts often adding up to no more than 1 percent. The detergent (the foam-producing ingredient that dissolves oil) is the most important ingredient to note when buying shampoos. Avoid detergents from the sulfate and glycol families: Sodium lauryl sulfate and propylene glycol are two of the worst offenders. Sodium lauryl sulfate, also used in engine degreasers, is a suspected carcinogen; propylene glycol, a compound used in aircraft deicing fluid, may cause skin irritations such as hives and allergic reactions, even in low doses.

Unfortunately, even organic shampoos can contain harsh ingredients. To find the best shampoos, choose those with low ratings on the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep database at ewg.org/skindeep (see a few of our favorites on the next page).

Shampoo Less

Shampooing less often can help straight hair reclaim its natural fullness and body, and maybe even give it a wavy texture that has otherwise been shampooed out. Rework your washing regimen: Aim to use shampoo only three times a week.

Slaves to shampoo may find this number extreme, but it's possible—and actually better—to refresh your hair without shampoo every once in awhile. Between washings, treat your hair with some of the natural solutions to follow.

The No-Poo Method: Giving Up Shampoo Completely

What would happen if you stopped using commercial shampoos completely? Many people have committed to such a challenge, referring to it as the “no-poo method,” with promising results. Once the difficult transition period wears off—the few weeks where your hair may feel too greasy or too dry—the positive effects will start to show. Your hair will start producing its natural oils at a slower rate, leaving it naturally soft and wavy. As a bonus, the no-poo method is cheaper than buying organic shampoos and it’s a surefire way to control the ingredients that come into contact with your hair.

To try the no-poo method, follow this simple two-step routine. (If you don’t want to eliminate shampoo completely, try this same routine between washings to cut back on the amount of shampoo you use.)

1. Baking soda “shampoo.” Versatile baking soda has the power to replace shampoo entirely, as it removes styling product buildup and naturally leaves behind more manageable hair. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon baking soda onto your scalp when wet, massage into your roots, and rinse as you would your regular shampoo.
2. Apple cider vinegar rinse. Follow up with an apple cider vinegar rinse, which balances the alkalinity of baking soda, removes buildup and residue, and closes hair cuticles. Pour about 1/2 cup over hair after washing it with baking soda, then rinse.

More Natural Shampoo Alternatives

- **Shampoo bars.** Replace your liquid shampoo products with shampoo bars. These bars are generally more eco-friendly than their liquid counterparts—they use less packaging, last a lot longer than liquid shampoo and are typically sulfate-free.
- **Aloe vera.** Aloe is antibacterial, antiseptic, emollient and moisturizing. Studies have even shown it to enhance cellular regeneration. Use aloe gel to improve your hair’s health between washings by gently massaging it into wet hair and scalp and rinsing as you would shampoo.
- **Soapwort.** Soapwort contains saponins, which work as a gentle but effective cleaner. Finely chop 2 tablespoons fresh or 1 tablespoon dried soapwort root or leaves and stems, add 1 cup warm water and stir until suds form. After straining, massage 1/2 cup of the preparation into your scalp and rinse. Store the remaining mixture in the fridge for up to a week.
- **Calendula.** With stimulating, anti-inflammatory and demulcent properties, this healing plant is great for sensitive skin. Fill a glass jar with dried calendula flowers and cover with an unrefined oil such as avocado. Close the jar and store it for two to three weeks in a dark place, shaking it every day for the first week. Strain the oil into a clean glass jar and use as you would your regular shampoo.

• **Essential oils.** In addition to their pleasing aromas, many essential oils can benefit hair. Be sure to buy pure essential oils from a health-food store. For shiny, silky strands, rub 1 drop rosemary or lavender oil into a natural-bristle hairbrush and lightly brush your hair from the scalp to the ends. To fight or treat dandruff, mix 2 drops tea tree essential oil with 2 tablespoons baking soda and water; use as you would shampoo.

• **Conditioning hair packs.** Massaging conditioning hair packs into clean hair will allow the natural creams and oils to penetrate the skin and work their magic. Mash or stir equal amounts of the following products together and apply to damp hair. Wrap your hair with plastic wrap or use a plastic shower cap to hold in heat and open up the hair follicles for deep conditioning. Wait 15 minutes then rinse thoroughly with cool water.

- For dry hair: Coconut oil, banana, avocado, mayonnaise
- For normal hair: Mayonnaise, egg, olive oil, unflavored yogurt
- For oily hair: Add 1 to 2 teaspoons lemon juice to the mix for normal hair

Make Your Own Shampoo

If you are looking to make natural shampoo, try this basic recipe first. It's easy to make and great on tresses. It will seem thinner in consistency than most commercial shampoos, but the results are equivalent.

1/4 cup water

1/4 cup liquid castile soap

1/2 teaspoon light vegetable oil (omit if you have very oily hair)

1. Mix together all ingredients. Pour shampoo into a squeeze bottle or empty shampoo bottle.
2. To use: Shampoo as you normally would and rinse well with cool water. Makes 4 ounces.

—Recipe courtesy Janice Cox

Coconut Oil for Hair

Coconut oil is among the best natural hair conditioners. It's loaded with vitamins E and K, and is very moisturizing. For a coconut oil deep condition, massage a spoonful of the oil to your scalp through the ends of your hair and wrap it up in a towel. Let it sit for 1 hour, then wash it out with a gentle shampoo.

HAIR MASKS FOR SHINY HEALTHY HAIR

By Cheryl-Ann Porter

In many cultures, rich, lustrous hair is regarded as a sign of fertility, strength and overall good health. Discover four DIY moisturising masks for each hair type that you can easily

make in minutes using all-natural ingredients you probably have sitting in your kitchen right now!

Skip the unnecessary expense plus the toxins and chemicals found in commercial hair products and look to your kitchen for the BEST natural conditioners to moisturize and revitalize your hair!

All Hair Types: Avocado and Honey

Cut and scoop out the flesh from a ripened avocado and mix in a tablespoon of organic honey. Apply to hair and allow it to sit for 20 minutes before rinsing it off in the shower.

Avocados are rich in a variety of vitamins and nutrients, including vitamin E and protein, both of which your hair needs to remain soft and healthy. Meanwhile, honey is a natural antibacterial agent.

Dry Hair: Olive Oil and Egg

In need of some major TLC? Combine three tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil with two eggs and apply the mixture to your hair and let the mixture sit for 20 minutes before rinsing in the shower.

The olive oil will help hydrate brittle locks, while the protein in the eggs will promote healthy hair growth.

Oily Hair: Apple Cider Vinegar and Lemon

Combine 1/4 cup of apple cider vinegar with the grated peel of an entire lemon and allow it to set for 15 minutes to absorb the excess oil from your scalp, and then rinse in the shower.

Apple cider vinegar will remove build up from styling products and conditioners and strengthen the hair shaft, leaving you with soft, shiny strands. It will also balance hair's pH level, kill bacteria, and is a cure for dandruff.

Dry, Flaky Scalp and Hair: Banana, Honey and Almond

Mash together 1/2 a ripe banana and add two tablespoons of honey and a few drops of almond oil and allow it to set with a shower cap on for 20 minutes before rinsing.

Bananas can increase the moisture of your hair, smooth frizz and soothe your itchy scalp.

Choose a mask that suits your hair condition and bring your hair back to life!

NATURAL DENTAL CARE FOR HEALTHY TEETH

By Amy Mayfield

Herbs can help fight tooth decay and gum disease when taken as a tincture or incorporated into homemade dental care products.

When it comes to healthy teeth and gums, keep one word in mind: prevention. Because many dental problems are the result of gum disease, focus on keeping your gums healthy with natural dental care.

An estimated 75 percent of Americans have some form of gum or periodontal disease, according to the American Dental Hygienists' Association. Regular dental visits (every six months is recommended for most) can treat the disease at its earliest stages, keeping your teeth healthy—and helping you spend less time in the dentist's chair.

Helpful Herbs

Plaque, the main cause of tooth decay and gum disease, starts building up about 20 minutes after eating. The first steps in reducing plaque buildup and maintaining oral health are basic care: Brush your teeth at least twice daily with a soft-bristled toothbrush and floss under the gumline once a day.

Used in combination with good basic dental care, healing herbs can bolster oral health. Herbalist Christopher Hobbs recommends taking diluted bloodroot tincture to protect teeth and gums against oral bacteria. Myrrh tincture helps strengthen gums and combat tooth and gum infections, and echinacea tincture helps the body fight oral bacteria, he says. Take tinctures of these herbs daily, following the manufacturer's instructions.

Aloe vera gel, a powerful anti-inflammatory and antibacterial healer, can help treat gum inflammation. Apply a small amount of aloe gel to the affected area several times daily, says Laurel Vukovic, an Ashland, Oregon-based author and herbalist.

Vukovic also recommends neem, an herb with antimicrobial properties that can help strengthen gums and prevent plaque. Neem is found in some natural toothpastes and mouthwashes.

Finally, green tea is another potent herbal remedy. In addition to its antioxidant and other health benefits, green tea's polyphenol compounds may inhibit the growth of oral bacteria. Drink two to three cups daily.

Supplements to Try

Supplements can also be good for oral health. Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) may improve circulation to the gums and help prevent gum disease. It's also a powerful antioxidant. Take 60 to 100 milligrams (mg) daily in capsule form.

A deficiency of vitamin C can cause gum disease, loose teeth and tooth loss. Researchers at the Linus Pauling Institute suggest the current recommended dietary allowance (75 mg for women, 90 mg for men) be increased to 200 mg. But choose supplements you swallow instead of chewable vitamin C tablets, as ascorbic acid can erode tooth enamel.

Also make sure you're getting 1,000 mg or more of calcium daily (either from your diet or in supplements). Calcium is necessary for building and maintaining healthy teeth, and if blood levels of calcium fall, the body draws calcium stores from the jaw, which can result in tooth loss. Combined with calcium, magnesium also helps keep teeth and bones strong. Aim for 400 mg per day.

Toothpaste Tips

Ever wonder what's in your toothpaste? Most contain mild abrasives such as calcium carbonate or hydrated aluminum oxides; fluoride to strengthen tooth enamel; humectants such as propylene or glycol to prevent water loss in the toothpaste; flavoring agents such as saccharin or other sweeteners that do not promote tooth decay; thickening agents; and detergents such as sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS) to create foaming, according to the American Dental Association. While these ingredients may not be overly dangerous, most holistic dentists suggest avoiding them. A study at the University of Oslo, Norway, showed a link between toothpastes that contain SLS and recurrent aphthous ulcers (more commonly known as canker sores). Fluoride remains a controversial ingredient that, when used in excess, may make developing teeth more brittle and may be linked to immune dysfunction and other diseases.

If you'd prefer to avoid artificial ingredients, it's simple to make your own toothpaste (see "DIY Natural Dental Care" below). Many natural products also are available, although some still contain fluoride and SLS. Check out our list of [recommended natural toothpastes and other dental care products](#).

DIY Natural Dental Care

It's simple to make your own toothpaste, natural mouthwash and other natural dental care products.

Mint Toothpaste Recipe

2 tablespoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1 tablespoon vegetable glycerin
20 drops peppermint essential oil

1. Mix all ingredients and store in an airtight container.
—Laurel Vukovic

Natural Tooth Whitener

1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon 3% hydrogen peroxide

1. Mix ingredients together.
2. Dip toothbrush in mixture and brush for 3 minutes, then rinse thoroughly. Follow with toothpaste.
—Laurel Vukovic

Natural Mouthwash Recipe

3/4 cup water
1/4 cup vodka
2 droppersful calendula tincture
2 droppersful goldenseal tincture
1 dropperful myrrh tincture
1 to 2 drops peppermint essential oil

1. Combine all ingredients and shake well.

2. Dilute 3 tablespoons of the rinse in 1/2 ounce water, and use as a mouthwash.
—Rosemary Gladstar

Toothache Remedy

If you have a toothache but can't get to the dentist right away, herbalist Rosemary Gladstar recommends this toothache poultice: Combine 1 part each powdered goldenseal, myrrh, spilanthes and turmeric with 1 drop clove essential oil. Combine the mixture with enough water to make a thick paste, then pack into a small cylinder-shaped poultice and apply directly to the tooth.

When to See the Dentist

Plan regular dental cleanings and exams twice a year. Be sure to make an appointment if you notice any of the following, as early detection and treatment are important:

- Red, tender or swollen gums
- Gums that bleed when you brush or floss
- Gums that begin pulling away from your teeth
- Loose permanent teeth
-

Changes in the way your top and bottom teeth align with each other

- Unusual sensitivity to hot and cold
- Persistent bad breath or an unusual taste in your mouth

Source: Mayo Clinic

HOMEMADE TOOTHPASTE

The cool, clean taste of mint is a classic toothpaste flavor. This pale-colored gel is made with fresh mint leaves and will help clean both your teeth and gums. Because it is nonabrasive, it's ideal for those with sensitive teeth and gums. **MAKES 2 OUNCES**

- 1 tablespoon fresh peppermint leaves, chopped
- 1/4 cup cold water

- 1/2 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon sunflower oil

1. Place mint leaves in a small saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring mixture to a boil. Remove from heat and allow to cool 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Mix together cornstarch and oil; stir until smooth.
3. Strain mint water, then mix it with cornstarch mixture.
4. Return pan to stovetop and bring mixture to a boil; cool completely. Stir well and place in a clean container.
5. To use, spread a small amount on a clean toothbrush and brush as usual.

NATURAL DEODORANT RECIPE

You'll need:

- 1/2 cup (125 ml) distilled water
- 1/4 cup (62.5 ml) witch hazel extract
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) aloe vera gel
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) liquid glycerin
- 15 drops rosemary essential oil
- 10 drops lavender essential oil
- Large pot
- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Metal tongs
- Cookie sheet
- 8-ounce (236 ml) spray bottle

1. Sterilize the bottle and tools in a hot-water bath.
2. Add the distilled water, witch hazel, and aloe vera to the bottle. Put the top on and shake the bottle vigorously. Before the ingredients have a chance to separate, add the glycerin and essential oils. Put the top back on, shake it up, and you are ready to use.

To apply

Shake well and spritz natural deodorant under each arm a couple of times. Wait to dry before getting dressed.

Yield

One 8-ounce (236 ml) spray bottle.

Note

This is a deodorant only. It will not help prevent any serious perspiration.

FRESH SPEARMINT LIP GLOSS

By Janice Cox

Fresh spearmint or peppermint work well, but you could use pineapple, cinnamon or chocolate mint for a different flavor. **MAKES 1/2 OUNCE**

- 1 teaspoon fresh spearmint leaves
- 2 teaspoons light oil, such as almond or walnut
- 1 teaspoon grated beeswax

1. Place leaves in a glass container. With the back of a spoon, gently crush to release natural oils.
2. Pour oil over leaves and allow mixture to sit several days. (For a stronger scent or taste, replace leaves each day with fresh ones.)
3. Remove mint leaves from oil. Mix mint oil and beeswax; heat gently until wax melts.
4. Pour mixture into a clean tube or container; cool completely.
5. To use, apply to lips.

MINT BODY LOTION

By Janice Cox

Fresh mint is an instant energizer; its scent alone instantly can elevate your mood. This easy-to-make lotion can be used after bathing to refresh and energize your whole body. Any mint variety (or combination) will work in this recipe. **MAKES 8 OUNCES**

- 1/2 cup strong fresh mint tea
- 1/8 teaspoon borax powder
- 1/2 cup sunflower oil

- 1 teaspoon coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon grated beeswax
- 3 to 4 drops peppermint essential oil (optional)

1. Mix together mint tea and borax; set aside.
2. Combine oils and beeswax in a heat-resistant container. Heat just until oils and wax have melted.
3. Gently heat tea and borax mixture until they are roughly the same temperature as oil and wax mixture. (You can do this in a water bath on a stovetop or in the microwave.)
4. Pour oil and wax mixture into a blender. With blender running on low speed, slowly add tea mix in a steady stream. After mixes are combined, continue blending until mixture reaches a smooth, creamy consistency.
5. Allow mixture to cool completely. Stir in essential oil if you prefer a stronger scent.
6. To use, massage into clean skin whenever you need a refreshing pick-me-up.

MINT BODY POWDER

By Janice Cox

This light body powder will keep you cool, refreshed and collected on a hot summer day. You can find the peppermint oil at your local natural foods store. **MAKES 8 OUNCES**

- 1/2 teaspoon peppermint essential oil
- 1 teaspoon witch hazel extract
- 1 cup cornstarch

Mix together oil, witch hazel and cornstarch in a sealable plastic bag or container. Seal container and shake gently until powder is well mixed. Pour into a clean shaker container.

To use, sprinkle onto clean skin.

BORAGE SEED OIL

Borage seed oil is extremely high in a special fatty acid called Gamma-linolenic Acid (GLA). Apply directly to the face and lips as a moisturizer. Also has anti-inflammatory properties. Barlean's Organic Oils carry Borage seed oil in softgels for around \$15.00 for 30 capsules.

MAKE YOUR OWN NON TOXIC CLEANING KIT!

By Annie B. Bond, Care 2

Most modern synthetic cleaning products are based on age-old formulas using natural ingredients that were passed down through the generations because the chemistry was right. Going back to the original naturally derived ingredients is a way to make cleaning products that work, don't pollute and save you money. Most are found in your kitchen cupboards. Mix and match with well-chosen and environmentally friendly green cleaning products found in health food stores, and you can easily and simply transform your home into a non-toxic and healthy haven.

Non-toxic cleaning can give you a deep feeling of gratification in knowing that your family's health is protected, and that your home is a place for your bodies to rest and recuperate rather than promote harm.

Making your own nontoxic cleaning kit will take you no time at all with these simple, straightforward directions, and with this kit you will be supplied with enough cleaning product for months of cleaning.

As an added bonus, ounce for ounce homemade cleaning formulas cost about one-tenth the price of their commercial counterpart—and that includes costly, but worthwhile essential oils, and concentrated, all-purpose detergents for homemade recipes.

SUPPLIES: What You Need To Get Started

- **Baking soda**
- **Washing soda**
- **White distilled vinegar**
- **A good liquid soap or detergent**
- **Tea tree oil**
- **6 clean spray bottles**
- **2 glass jars**

1. CREAMY SOFT SCRUBBER

Simply pour about 1/2 cup of baking soda into a bowl, and add enough liquid detergent to make a texture like frosting. Scoop the mixture onto a sponge, and wash the surface. This

is the perfect recipe for cleaning the bathtub because it rinses easily and doesn't leave grit.

Note: Add 1 teaspoon of vegetable glycerin to the mixture and store in a sealed glass jar, to keep the product moist. Otherwise just make as much as you need at a time.

2. WINDOW CLEANER

1/4-1/2 teaspoon liquid detergent
3 tablespoons vinegar
2 cups water
Spray bottle

Put all the ingredients into a spray bottle, shake it up a bit, and use as you would a commercial brand.

The soap in this recipe is important. It cuts the wax residue from the commercial brands you might have used in the past.

3. OVEN CLEANER

1 cup or more baking soda
Water
A squirt or two of liquid detergent

Sprinkle water generously over the bottom of the oven, then cover the grime with enough baking soda that the surface is totally white. Sprinkle some more water over the top. Let the mixture set overnight. You can easily wipe up the grease the next morning because the grime will have loosened. When you have cleaned up the worst of the mess, dab a bit of liquid detergent or soap on a sponge, and wash the remaining residue from the oven. If this recipe doesn't work for you it is probably because you didn't use enough baking soda and/or water.

4. ALL-PURPOSE SPRAY CLEANER

1/2 teaspoon washing soda
A dab of liquid soap
2 cups hot tap water
A few drops of tea tree oil

Combine the ingredients in a spray bottle and shake until the washing soda has dissolved. Apply and wipe off with a sponge or rag.

5. FURNITURE POLISH

1/2 teaspoon oil, such as olive (or jojoba, a liquid wax)

1/4 cup vinegar or fresh lemon juice

Mix the ingredients in a glass jar. Dab a soft rag into the solution and wipe onto wood surfaces. Cover the glass jar and store indefinitely.

6. VINEGAR DEODORIZER

Keep a clean spray bottle filled with straight 5 percent vinegar in your kitchen near your cutting board and in your bathroom and use them for cleaning. I often spray the vinegar on our cutting board before going to bed at night, and don't even rinse but let it set overnight. The smell of vinegar dissipates within a few hours. Straight vinegar is also great for cleaning the toilet rim. Just spray it on and wipe off.

7. MOLD KILLERS

2 teaspoons tea tree oil

2 cups water

Nothing natural works for mold and mildew as well as this spray. I've used it successfully on a moldy ceiling from a leaking roof, on a musty bureau, a musty rug, and a moldy shower curtain. Tea tree oil is expensive, but a little goes a very long way.

Note: The smell of tea tree oil is very strong, but it will dissipate in a few days.

Combine in a spray bottle, shake to blend, and spray on problem areas. Do not rinse. Makes two cups.

Vinegar Spray

Straight vinegar reportedly kills 82 percent of mold. Pour some white distilled vinegar straight into a spray bottle, spray on the moldy area, and let set without rinsing if you can put up with the smell. It will dissipate in a few hours.

SPRING CLEANSE ~ YOUR BODY

But if you really want to cleanse then DRINK, DRINK, DRINK. Here are 8 home made vitamin water recipes to help you keep the water flowing!

As a rule, you should try to avoid as much as possible industrial food and beverages

The classical : lemon/cucumber:

Mix in a pitcher: 10 cups of water + 1 cucumber and a lemon, thinly sliced + 1/4 cup fresh finely chopped basil leaf + 1/3 of finely chopped fresh mint leaves. Leave in the refrigerator overnight before serving.

The granite : Strawberry/Lime or Raspberry/Lime

Mix in a pitcher : 10 cups of water + 6 strawberries / Or Raspberries and one thinly sliced lime + 12 finely chopped fresh mint leaves. Leave in the refrigerator overnight before serving.

The digestive : Fennel/citrus

First: infuse 1 to 3 grams of dried and crushed fennel in 150 ml of boiling water for 5-10 minutes. Allow to cool.

Mix in a pitcher: 10 cups of water + lemon juice (put the leftover lemon in the mix) + a small thinly sliced orange + 12 fresh chopped mint leaves + the infusion of fennel seeds. Leave in refrigerator overnight before serving.

The antiOX : Blackberry/Sage

Note that a part from the berries, sage leaves is the herb that has the highest antioxidant content.

Mix in a pitcher : 10 cups of water + 1 cup of blackberries that have been very slightly crushed + 3-4 sage leaves. Leave in refrigerator overnight before serving.

WATERmelon : watermelon/Rosemary

Mix in a pitcher : 10 cups of water + 1 cup of watermelon cut into cubes + 2 rosemary stems. Leave in refrigerator overnight before serving.

The exotic : Pineapple/Mint

Mix in a pitcher : 10 cups of water + 1 cup of pineapple cut into cubes + 12 fresh mint leaves finely chopped. Leave in the refrigerator overnight before serving.

The traditional : Apple/cinnamon

Mix in a pitcher : 10 cups of water + 1 cup of apple cut into cubes + 2 cinnamon sticks + 2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon. Leave in the refrigerator overnight before serving.

The zingibir : Ginger/tea

In advance: heat 1 teaspoon of ginger in two cups of tea, let it cool down.

Mix in a pitcher: 10 cups of water with two cups of the ginger tea + 4-5 pieces of fresh ginger cut into cubes. Leave in the refrigerator overnight before serving.

Ice Pack

1 part rubbing alcohol
3 parts water

Put in freezer ziploc bag and put in freezer. Will remain pliable to mold to sore foot, etc.

What is Apple Cider Vinegar?

Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) is an effective natural bacteria-fighting agent that contains many vital minerals and trace elements such as potassium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorous, chlorine, sodium, sulfur, copper, iron, silicon and fluorine that are vital for a healthy body.

Natural Apple Cider Vinegar is made by crushing fresh, organically grown apples and allowing them to mature in wooden barrels. This boosts the natural fermentation qualities of the crushed apples, which differs from the refined and distilled vinegars found in supermarkets. When the vinegar is mature, it contains a dark, cloudy, web-like bacterial foam called mother, which becomes visible when the rich brownish liquid is held to the light. The mother can be used to add to other vinegar to hasten maturity for making more Apple Cider Vinegar.

Natural vinegars that contain the mother have enzymes and minerals that other vinegars in grocery stores may not have due to over-processing, over-heating, and filtration. For

this reason, it is recommended that you purchase only unpasteurized Apple Cider Vinegar, with an ideal acidity (pH) level of 5 to 7, this health drink is a natural probiotic.

What are the Benefits of Apple Cider Vinegar?

Natural Apple Cider Vinegar is a wonderful natural cure for a number of ailments which usually require antibiotics and other medications that have a number of side effects. In particular, Apple Cider Vinegar has been known to:

- Reduce sinus infections and sore throats
- Balance high cholesterol
- Cure skin conditions such as acne
- Protect against food poisoning
- Fight allergies in both humans and animals
- Prevent muscle fatigue after exercise
- Strengthen the immune system
- Increase stamina
- Increase metabolism which promotes weight loss
- Improve digestion and cure constipation
- Alleviate symptoms of arthritis and gout
- Prevents bladder stones and urinary tract infections

Uses of Apple Cider Vinegar:

General Health Problems:

Weight Loss

The use of apple cider vinegar as a home remedy for weight loss is centuries old. D.C. Jarvis, M.D maintained that an overweight person could lose weight gradually by taking 2 teaspoons of ACV in a glass of water before meals.

Bad Breath

Due to its antiseptic properties, Apple Cider Vinegar makes a wonderful remedy for bad breath or halitosis. Simply add 2 teaspoons of ACV into a cup of water and gargle the mixture in your mouth for 10 seconds at a time and spit the solution out. Repeat until the cup is empty.

Body Odor

Apple Cider Vinegar is an effective body odor remedy, since it can help adjust the skin's pH level which helps to eliminate odor-causing bacteria. For armpit odor, simply wipe them once each morning with undiluted apple cider vinegar (using a cotton ball). For foot odor, fill a pan with warm water and add 1/3 cup of ACV, then let your feet soak in this mixture for 15 minutes once per week.

Skin Problems and Infections:

Acne

Apple Cider Vinegar is a natural cure for acne. Apply a solution of apple cider vinegar and water (2 tablespoons to 1 eight ounce glass of water) with a cotton ball several times a day. This will help reduce infection and dry out inflammation.

Age Spots

Apple Cider Vinegar contains sulfur that fights the effects of aging, which makes it suitable for treating age spots. Apply daily, to these darkened areas of the skin, a solution containing 2 teaspoons of apple cider vinegar and 1 teaspoon of onion juice. According to this home remedy, the spots should begin to fade within 2 weeks.

Yeast Infection

Apple Cider Vinegar has been found to be an effective treatment for yeast infections.

Stomach Problems:

Heartburn

This usually occurs after eating, sometimes up to two hours later. This very unpleasant feeling can be alleviated by taking 2 TBS Apple Cider Vinegar in 8 OZ of water, taken three times a day before meals.

Constipation

Apple Cider Vinegar is frequently used as a natural cure for constipation.

Diarrhea

There are various causes for diarrhea, and although it should not be left untreated, it is often a natural way for the body to rid itself of harmful compounds and ingested materials. Apple Cider Vinegar is a fantastic natural remedy for diarrhea since the high pectin concentration acts as a protective coating which soothes the irritated lining of the colon. A suggestion is to add 2 tablespoons of Apple Cider Vinegar to a large glass of water, and drink this 3 times daily while the symptoms persist.

Major Illnesses:

Diabetes

Apple Cider Vinegar may help to control high blood sugar levels, which is why it is often used as a natural treatment for Diabetes.

How to take it?

For daily maintenance, weight loss and pH balancing:

- 2 teaspoons in 8 oz of water 3x a day (taken before your meals)

For treating an acute condition like acid reflux, cough, bronchitis, or sore throat:

- 2 Tablespoons in 8 oz of water 3x a day (taken before your meals) .

To help with the taste you can always add a teaspoon of raw honey.

Cocoa Butter Lip Balm Recipe

July/August 2013

Story by Gina DeBacker, Recipe by Janice Cox

Lip balms are simpler to make at home than you might think. Create yours with one of the best ingredients for skin: cocoa butter. This creamy ingredient has a mild chocolate scent and naturally conditions and protects lips. For more DIY beauty recipes like this one, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Cocoa Butter Lip Balm Recipe

- 1/2 teaspoon grated beeswax
- 1 teaspoon grated cocoa butter
- 1/2 teaspoon light, unrefined oil (almond, walnut and sunflower all work well)

1. In a small heat-resistant dish, combine ingredients over low heat on a stovetop or in the microwave until mixture begins to melt. Heat slowly, making sure not to scorch wax.

2. Remove from heat and stir until completely melted. Pour into a small, clean container with a lid. Allow mixture to cool and harden before putting on the lid.

3. To use: Rub a small amount onto your lips. Makes 1/2 ounce.

Homemade Lip Balm Variations

- **Extra Flavor:** Add a few drops of a flavored oil such as sweet orange, vanilla or raspberry after the mixture has cooled. These oils are used in cooking and can be found in the baking aisle of most stores.
- **Color Burst:** For a punch of color, add a few pinches of dried beet root powder after the mixture has been removed from heat, but before it has completely cooled.
- **Nourishing:** Swap cocoa butter with African shea butter, another well-known lip conditioner, to care for cracked lips.

Homemade Facial Cleanser Recipe

July/August 2013

Story by Gina DeBacker, Recipe for Janice Cox

Facial cleansers should be a fundamental part of a daily skin-care regimen. With items from your kitchen, you can concoct a safe and effective blend. Oatmeal is a mild and soothing skin cleanser that is especially well-suited for sensitive skin, while honey is a natural antiseptic that can also work as a luxurious mask all on its own. For more DIY beauty recipes like this one, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Homemade Facial Cleanser Recipe

- 1 cup warm water
- 1/2 cup uncooked oatmeal
- 1 tablespoon honey

1. Place all ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend on high speed until mixture is smooth and creamy. Pour into a clean container with a lid.

2. To use: Gently massage a dime-size amount of this cleanser into your skin. Scrub skin, rinse well with tepid water and pat skin dry. Makes 4 ounces.

Facial Cleanser Variations

- **Moisture Boost:** For dry skin, add 1 teaspoon of natural oil, such as almond or sunflower, to make a moisturizing cleanser.
- **Astringent:** Add 1 teaspoon of fresh lemon juice or witch hazel to your mixture to treat oily skin.
- **Skin Beautifier:** Swap honey with 1 tablespoon agave nectar. Agave nectar is a natural humectant that also may provide anti-aging benefits.

Homemade Deodorant Cream

July/August 2013

Story by Gina DeBacker, Recipe by Janice Cox

Natural deodorants are a tricky topic. While they don't typically work as well as antiperspirants, they exclude aluminum, the active ingredient in most antiperspirants that

temporarily blocks sweat but may be linked to Alzheimer's disease, brain and respiratory disorders, and breast cancer. To avoid aluminum, try making this deodorant cream at home. Cream deodorants are most beneficial for dry skin. This recipe uses baking soda, a classic odor-absorbing ingredient for all skin types. For more DIY beauty recipes, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Homemade Deodorant Cream

- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons baking soda

1. Blend all ingredients together until smooth and spoon into a clean container.
2. To use: Rub a small amount of the cream under your arms. Makes 3 ounces.

Homemade Deodorant Variations

- Simplify: Omit the vegetable shortening if you prefer a deodorant powder over a cream.
- Smell Fresh: For a scented deodorant, add a few drops of your favorite essential oil. Try lavender for its antibacterial properties and refreshing aroma.

Homemade Perfume Recipe

July/August 2013

Story by Gina DeBacker, Recipe by Janice Cox

Employ traditional methods of perfume-making using plant oils and alcohol.

Synthetic fragrances make up many conventional perfumes, and many, if not most, of these fragrances are derived from petroleum. We don't have to rely on synthetic chemicals to smell good. Historically, perfumes were made by steeping flowers in a jar with alcohol and a small amount of oil. Use this timeless practice to make cologne water at home. It is much lighter than perfume and perfect for daytime use. The following blends make a great starting point. Experiment to devise your own signature scent. For more DIY beauty recipes, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Homemade Perfume Recipe

- 1/4 cup natural alcohol such as vodka or witch hazel
- 1/4 cup distilled or boiled water
- 2 to 3 drops each of your favorite essential oils (see variations at right for some ideas)

1. Mix ingredients together. Pour into a clean container.

2. To use: Spray or splash the scented cologne onto your skin. Makes 4 ounces.

Scent Variations

- Floral: Rose, frangipani, jasmine, violet and lilac
- Spice: Cinnamon, ginger, clove and allspice
- Wood: Pine, cedar and sandalwood
- Fruit: Lemon, orange, peach and coconut
- Herbal: Lavender, chamomile and sage
- Exotic: Herbal musk, ylang ylang and vanilla

Basic Body Lotion Recipe

July/August 2013

Story by Gina DeBacker, Recipe by Janice Cox

When we slather lotion on our bodies, it's absorbed by our skin. And that can be bad news, as many conventional lotions contain some of the most hazardous chemicals found in personal-care products, among them parabens (preservatives that mimic estrogen), phthalates (linked to infertility) and petroleum byproducts (possible carcinogens). Lotions, which are basically an emulsion of oil and water, are easy to make at home without these troubling additives. In fact, the technique to making lotion is similar to that used when making mayonnaise or salad dressing. For more DIY beauty recipes like this one, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Basic Body Lotion Recipe

- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup distilled or boiled water

- 1/2 cup light unrefined oil (almond, sunflower, canola and olive oils all work well)
- 1 tablespoon grated beeswax

1. Dissolve baking soda in water in a saucepan. Set aside.

2. Mix oil and beeswax in a double boiler and slowly heat until wax begins to melt, being sure not to scorch wax. Stir until wax is completely melted. Keeping the wax over low heat and stirring occasionally, put baking soda mixture on a separate burner and heat over low heat until it is roughly the same temperature as the wax mixture (about 100 degrees).

3. Slowly add baking soda mixture to wax mixture while stirring to combine. Allow lotion to cool completely. You may want to stir occasionally as it cools to keep oil and water from separating. Store cooled lotion in a clean container with a tight-fitting lid.

4. To use: Massage into your skin. Makes 8 ounces.

Body Lotion Variations

- **Energy Boost:** Add 4 to 5 drops of peppermint essential oil to the finished lotion for a cooling and energizing blend. Stir well.
- **Soothing:** Replace the water with 1/4 cup strong chamomile tea to make a lotion with skin-soothing benefits.
- **Moisturizing:** For an extra-rich consistency perfect for dry skin, add 1 tablespoon of grated cocoa butter to the wax mixture before you combine it with the water mixture.

SUNBURN SOOTHER (OR ANY BURN)

Jeannie Brown

When you get a sunburn, cut off the end of a white onion and rub the juice all over your burn. It will sting just a slight amount, but will take out the burn and you will not blister. This also works on grease burns, oven burns or just burning your hand on hot water. Make sure the rub the onion over the burnt area for a few minutes. I have used this many, many, time and it always works.

EAR INFECTION

Jeannie Brown

If you have an ear infection draw about 2ml water and 2ml vinegar in a syringe. Place a small amount in your ear and lie on your side for about 5-10 minutes. Turn your head to the opposite side and drain the fluid out. This will get rid of an ear infection. Do 3 to 4 times a day until the infection is gone. I have personally used this several times as I get frequent ear infections because of allergies. It clears up the infection and I don't have to take antibiotics.

Homemade Hair Rinse

A mint and vinegar rinse can restore hair's natural pH balance.

Hair rinses are an excellent way to maintain healthy, shiny hair. Best of all, they are simple to make. Use this hair rinse once a week to help keep your scalp free of dead skin cells and other surface debris, which can clog pores and inhibit hair growth. Mint is energizing and will leave your hair smelling fresh, while apple cider vinegar gently cleanses the scalp and restores its natural pH balance. Always dilute vinegar with water before applying to your hair as it is a strong acid. For more DIY beauty recipes like this one, read the original article, [6 Basic Homemade Beauty Products](#).

Homemade Hair Rinse

- 1/2 cup fresh mint leaves or 1 tablespoon dried
- 1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup boiling water

1. Combine mint and vinegar in a medium bowl, then pour boiling water over the mixture. Allow it to cool completely; strain out leaves.

2. To use: Pour entire mixture over your scalp after shampooing and massage well. Let sit a few minutes, then rinse with tepid water. Makes 12 ounces.

Hair Rinse Variations

- Power Boost: Add 1 teaspoon baking soda to your mixture to remove residues left behind from styling products.
- Go Blond: Replace mint leaves with 1/2 cup chamomile tea for subtle blond highlights.

- Darker Tresses: For darker highlights, replace mint leaves with equal amounts fresh or dried sage leaves. Over time, this rinse can even darken gray hairs.

Classic Homemade Ketchup Recipe

June 2012 Web

By Andrea Chesman

Skip the hidden sugar in store-bought condiments by learning to make your own ketchup at home!

In [The Pickled Pantry](#) (Storey, 2012), author Andrea Chesman offers a guide to pickling that features recipes for everything from crisp cucumbers to carrots, rhubarb, cabbage and pineapple. In this excerpt from chapter 5, “Salsas, Relishes and Chutneys,” Chesman shares a homemade ketchup recipe for a classic ketchup that will remind your palate of what this condiment used to taste like before Heinz came along.

Classic Homemade Tomato Ketchup Recipe

makes 5 half-pints

No store-bought flavor here, just old-fashioned goodness. This is what ketchup used to taste like, before Heinz stepped in and retrained our palates.

Ingredients

12 cups chopped ripe plum tomatoes (6 pounds)
1 large onion, chopped
1 red bell pepper, diced
1-1/4 cups cider vinegar
2 teaspoons celery seeds
1-1/2 teaspoons mustard seeds
2 cinnamon sticks
1/2 cup honey or firmly packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon pickling or fine sea salt

1. Combine the tomatoes, onion, bell pepper, and cider vinegar in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil, decrease the heat, and simmer for 30 minutes, until soft.
2. Transfer the mixture to a blender in batches and purée until smooth. Return to the saucepan.

3. Tie together the celery seeds, mustard seeds, and cinnamon sticks in a spice bag (see How to Make a Spice Bag, page 20). Add the spice bag to the saucepan, along with the honey and salt. Simmer for 20 to 30 minutes, until the ketchup has the desired consistency, stirring frequently to avoid scorching. Remove and discard the spice bag.
4. Ladle the hot ketchup into clean hot half-pint canning jars, leaving 1/8 inch headspace. Remove any air bubbles and seal.
5. Process in a boiling-water bath for 15 minutes, according to the directions on page 31. Let cool undisturbed for 12 hours. Store in a cool, dry place.

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Homemade Mustard Recipe

June 2012 Web
By Andrea Chesman

In [The Pickled Pantry](#) (Storey, 2012), author Andrea Chesman offers a guide to pickling that features recipes for everything from crisp cucumbers to carrots, rhubarb, cabbage and pineapple. In this excerpt from chapter 5, “Salsas, Relishes and Chutneys,” Chesman shares a homemade mustard recipe that will have you tossing the store-bought variety in the trash.

Homemade Mustard Recipe

makes 3 half-pints (tastes fantastic!!! 6/26/13)

Collected this recipe from Olwen Woodier, author of three cookbooks, including the *Apple Cookbook*, which won the R.T. French Co. Best Cookbook Tastemaker Award. Ironically, Woodier prefers her own mustard to French’s.

Ingredients

- 2 ounces mustard seeds (1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons)
- 1 cup white wine, or more if needed
- 1/2 cup wine vinegar, cider vinegar, malt vinegar, or distilled white vinegar (used 3/4 cup vinegar)
- 1/2 cup water (used 3/4 cup water, left out white wine)
- 2 tablespoons honey or maple syrup

1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1/2 teaspoon pickling or fine sea salt

1. Put the mustard seeds in a small bowl, cover with the wine, vinegar, and water, and let soak overnight.
2. Transfer the seeds and liquid to a blender or food processor. Add the honey, allspice, and salt. Blend until the mixture is thick and smooth. If the mustard is too thick, add more wine, vinegar, or water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the mixture has a pleasing texture. Give the mixture a final blend and pour into sterilized hot half-pint canning jars. Store in the refrigerator. It will keep at least 6 months.

Kitchen Notes

- During blending, you can add 1 tablespoon of your favorite dried herb (such as tarragon, lemon thyme, or oregano), 1/4–1/2 cup drained green peppercorns, or 1/2 cup fresh basil leaves.
- The vinegar you choose will affect the flavor of the mustard. Mustard made with distilled white vinegar will be quite sharp; malt vinegar and wine vinegar produce a mellow mustard.
- Maple syrup can replace the honey.

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Classic Sweet Pickle Relish Recipe

June 2012 Web
By Andrea Chesman

In [The Pickled Pantry](#) (Storey, 2012), author Andrea Chesman offers a guide to pickling that features recipes for everything from crisp cucumbers to carrots, rhubarb, cabbage and pineapple. In this excerpt from chapter 5, “Salsas, Relishes and Chutneys,” Chesman shares a classic sweet pickle relish recipe for a condiment that goes well with everything from barbecued meat to grilled cheese.

Classic Sweet Pickle Relish Recipe

makes 7 to 8 half-pints

What doesn't go well with a sweet pickle relish? It makes a great pairing with such homey favorites as hot dogs, barbecued meat on buns, grilled cheese, crackers and cheese, cold-cut sandwiches, and tuna fish salad. A spoonful or two added to my Sweet Pickle Macaroni Salad makes an all-American classic.

Ingredients

- 4 cups finely chopped cucumbers
- 2 cups finely chopped onions
- 1 green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup pickling or fine sea salt
- 2 cups cider vinegar
- 3 cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon celery seeds
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds

1. Combine the cucumbers, onions, and green and red bell peppers in a large bowl. Sprinkle with the salt and toss well to mix. Cover with cold water. Let stand for at least 2 hours, and up to 6 hours. Drain well, pressing out the excess liquid.
2. Combine the cider vinegar, sugar, celery seeds, and mustard seeds in a saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Add the vegetables and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Pack into clean hot half-pint canning jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove any air bubbles and seal.
4. Process in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes, according to the directions on page 31. Let cool undisturbed for 12 hours. Store in a cool, dry place. Do not open for at least 6 weeks to allow the flavors to develop.

Cucumber Relish

Anything goes in a relish. If your cucumbers are somewhat overripe, just cut each in half lengthwise and scrape away the seeds before chopping. You can use either salad cucumbers or pickling cucumbers—or both—for a relish. The texture will be crunchier with pickling cucumbers because they have a greater ratio of skin to flesh, but the difference will be small.

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www.farmandfieldtotable.org to find local organic producers.

10 FUN WAYS TO USE CHIA

By Sarah Wilson

Chia seeds are the new quinoa. The new ingredient to wriggle its way into the mainstream after a few decades as the fibrous, whole-mealy staple of the granola belt. I know many of you out there are still trying to work out what to do with them once you've bought a packet. And since I hate the idea of anyone buying a packet of anything and having it sit there going to waste, henceforth a wee list of clever applications.

I've written on why chia seeds are so healthy before. Amongst many things, they're godsend when you're quitting sugar. They help to control your appetite because they fill you up (with the addition of liquid they swell to 17 times their original size) and they're a fabulous source of protein. They're also full of nutrients – vitamins A, B, D, E, calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium – which help with the detox hell that some can suffer.

Here are 10 ideas on how you can use chia in your diet.

1. Use In Place Of an Egg In Recipes

Substitute 1 tablespoon of chia seeds (preferably finely ground) + 3 tablespoons of water per egg.

2. Thicken Up Soups Or Gravies

If you don't want to use cornstarch or other thickening agents, add a teaspoon of chia seeds or chia bran at a time until you reach your desired thickness. Bear in mind it takes a minute or two for the seeds to swell and work their magic. Be patient!

3. Sprout Chia Seeds To Use In Salads.

These things are quite zesty...a bit like broccoli sprouts. Chia seeds are mucilaginous so you can't use the usual tray or jar sprouters. Instead...

- Sprinkle a thin layer of seeds on the bottom of an unlaquered terra cotta dish or plate.
- Put the terra cotta dish in a larger plate of water.
- Cover with another plate.
- Small amounts of water permeate the terra cotta plate upon which the chia seeds sit, and provide exactly the right amount of water to sprout them.
- Day 2, lightly mist the seeds (or sprinkle) with water.
- Day 3, they should be right to eat.

4. Add To a Chocolate Brownie or Truffle Recipe To Turn Them Into Protein Bars

Throw in a few tablespoons of protein powder while you're at.

5. Try a Chia-coconut Goob, Especially if You're An Athlete

Just mix coconut water and some seeds to form an electrolyte-laden "goo". I got my Dad onto this. He runs marathons and does 24-hour mountain bike races and swears by the idea (and he's a hard guy to get on board!). It's infinitely better than the commercial goobs and energy drinks.

6. Use as a Slow Cooker Aid.

Cooking with a slow cooker can often leave you with a lot of excess liquid. I do two things.

The first: I thicken the sauce by adding some seeds or chia seed bran.

The second, I remove any excess liquid (a very brothy, nutritious mixture) and put in a jar with some chia seeds and then eat with toast, over rice, pasta or vegetables.

7. An Easy Thick Omelette.

Add chia seeds to beaten eggs, soak for 10 minutes and turn into an omelette or frittata.

8. Make Crackers.

Make a thin batter of ground chia seeds and milk and cook in a slow oven to make crackers.

9. Make a Cinnamon Chia Butter.

Add ground seeds to nut butter and amp the nutrition. Or add to butter with some cinnamon and spread on hot toast.

10. Make a Healthy Pudding.

Add 1/2 cup of chia seeds to 1 1/2 cups of almond or cashew milk. I make mine in a jar and carry it to the office, or on planes when I'm travelling. It's filling, can be made the night before and is spill-proof!

[Lisa Coyne · Northern Michigan University](#) One of my favorite summer breakfasts is Overnight Chia Oatmeal: Mix 1/4 cup steel cut oats, 1 cup unsweetened vanilla almond milk, 2 tablespoons chia, 1 tablespoon raisins or goji berries and a generous topping of cinnamon, stir well. Cover and refrigerate overnight, in the morning, stir again and enjoy.

HOW TO MAKE HOMEMADE VANILLA EXTRACT

Harvested from the pods of beautiful and exotic orchids, vanilla is a delicious flavor enjoyed by people all over the world. Pure Vanilla celebrates its unique taste with a stunning array of recipes, from cakes and cookies to custards and creams. In the following excerpt from Chapter 3 “Cookies and Bars,” discover how easy it is to create your own delicious vanilla extract. For more information on storing and using vanilla, visit [Vanilla Facts: Everything You Need to Know](#).

You can purchase this book from the Mother Earth Living store: [Pure Vanilla](#).

Homemade vanilla extract is one of those glorious things that cause people to marvel at your Martha-esque domestic skills. It's both terrific party-conversation fodder and an economical way to enjoy copious amounts of pure vanilla extract.

And it couldn't be simpler. All you need is a clean jar or bottle with a tight-fitting lid, whole vanilla beans, and a clear neutral-tasting liquor (vodka is my top choice). For an 8-ounce jar, 2 split beans should do, but you can add more if you like. Let the sealed jar sit in a cool, dark place for about 2 months before using. I also add scraped seedpods to the extract jar after I've used them in recipes, unless they land in my container of vanilla sugar first. As you use the extract, top off the jar with more of the same type of liquor for a nearly never-ending supply.

Aside from being a great way to save money on a pricey ingredient, making your own extract is an excellent opportunity to use some of the more exotic flavors of whole beans in liquid form, since store-bought extracts rarely come in such varieties. Magical! You can also combine several different varieties of vanilla in one batch of extract, creating your own special blends. Few things make a more fabulous edible gift than homemade vanilla extract in a vintage bottle decorated with a darling handmade tag. Martha's got nuthin' on you.

This excerpt has been reprinted with permission from *Pure Vanilla: Irresistible Recipes and Essential Techniques* by Shauna Sever, published by Quirk Books, 2012. Buy this book from our store: [Pure Vanilla](#).

HOMEMADE MOSQUITO TRAP



Items needed:

1 cup of water

1/4 cup of brown sugar

1 gram of yeast

1 2-liter bottle

HOW:

1. Cut the plastic bottle in half.
2. Mix brown sugar with hot water. Let cool. When cold, pour in the bottom half of the bottle.
3. Add the yeast. No need to mix. It creates carbon dioxide, which attracts mosquitoes.
4. Place the funnel part, upside down, into the other half of the bottle, taping them together if desired.
5. Wrap the bottle with something black, leaving the top uncovered, and place it outside in an area away from your normal gathering area. (Mosquitoes are also drawn to the color black.)

Change the solution every 2 weeks for continuous control.

NATURAL HERBAL REMEDIES FROM THE GARDEN

May/June 2005

By Jennifer Rabin

Once you know how to process different plant parts, when to harvest the part of the plant you're interested in, and the difference between using fresh and dried herbs, making homegrown medicine is all about being creative.

If you're a gardener, the back yard in summertime is your supermarket and your playground. It also can be your pharmacy. Why stop at clipping flowers and picking tomatoes when you can make teas, bath products, poultices, oils and medicinal foods from the fresh herbs growing right outside your door?

Summer is the peak season for fresh, seasonal remedies to treat all the dings and scratches you and your family are likely to get from working in the garden, climbing trees, building forts and mixing it up with nature. It's also the perfect time to take advantage of the garden's abundance by filling up your medicine cabinet with remedies for the coming months. Imagine having a ready answer when someone in your family comes down with the flu, has an ear infection or just wants to pamper herself with an herbal bath.

If you keep in mind some general rules about how to process different plant parts, when to harvest the part of the plant you're interested in, and the difference between using fresh and dried herbs, the rest is up to your creativity. Use the tried-and-true recipes featured in this article, then go into the garden and create your own based solely on which plants speak to you the loudest.

How to Harvest Herbs for Healing

The most important thing to remember is: you want to harvest a plant when most of its energy is in the part from which you are going to make medicine. For example, if you want to pick burdock roots to add to soup, you wouldn't want to take the root when the leaves are just beginning to sprout, because the leaves are where the plant is concentrating its energy. The best time to take roots is early spring before the above-ground parts have begun to show, or late fall after the plant has gone to seed and its energy has traveled back underground.

Simple Medicine: How to Make Herbal Tea

Nothing could be simpler or provide you with more instant gratification than tea made with fresh herbs from the garden. There's something tremendously satisfying about going into the garden and tearing off a few leaves here, a few flowers there, pouring some boiling water over them, and sitting down for a cup of freshly harvested tea in the middle of the afternoon.

According to Richo Cech, author of *Making Plant Medicine* (Horizon Herbs, 2000), the plants most appropriate for fresh infusions are angelica, calendula, catnip, dandelion, gentian, horehound, lemon balm, lovage, plantain, self-heal and thyme. This is not to say you can't experiment with making fresh infusions of other herbs, though. Along the way, you'll find that fresh herbs impart a far more glorious color to water than their dried counterparts.

As a general rule, the medicinal properties in dried herbs are more accessible for extraction than in fresh herbs because the process of dehydration causes the cell walls to become more fragile and to give up their contents more readily. For this reason, it will be necessary to use a larger quantity of the fresh plant when making tea than you would of the same plant in dried form. So for fresh herb tea, it's best to finely chop or tear the plant (some people prefer the mortar and pestle route) and loosely pack it in a glass jar. Cover with boiling water and a lid (to prevent volatile oils from escaping) and steep until it has cooled enough to drink, about 20 minutes. Strain the infusion into a glass or drink it straight from the jar. You might try this method with a mixture of mint, lemon balm and catnip for a refreshing, calming tea.

Trading Herbs

If you have no garden to call your own, try approaching a neighbor about arranging a barter. Gardeners often have more plants than they know what to do with. In exchange for

providing you with their surplus herbs, you might offer to give them half of whatever you make. If they don't have a particular herb you want to concoct something out of, you could propose a similar deal for the next season: they provide the garden space and the watering, you buy and plant the seeds, and you both divvy up the results.

Drying Herbs

If you prefer working with dried plants, there are many ways to dehydrate the herbs you've picked. You'll see fairly consistent results if you lay your herbs flat on a framed screen in a warm, dry place, ensuring that air will circulate to all sides of the plant. Some people swear by using a food dehydrator on a very low setting (while this is certainly the quickest method, it's not exactly the most natural or energy efficient). Others rely on nothing fancier than some twine and a well-placed nail from which to hang the bundled herb – a technique closest to the historical method of hanging bundles from the rafters. Heartier plants, such as rosemary, thyme and sage, will dry just fine with this low-maintenance approach. More delicate herbs, or herbs with a higher moisture content, such as basil, mints and lemon balm, will be better off lying flat in a well-ventilated area. The drying time depends on the moisture content of the plant and can take anywhere from a couple of days to two weeks. Avoid drying herbs in the oven or in direct sun, as this will affect the color and flavor of the plant and your finished product.

Immunity-Boosting Herbs

In the middle of summer, colds and flu are generally far from our minds, but this is a great time to stock up on bug fighters of all kinds.

If you are fortunate enough to have an elder tree (*Sambucus nigra*) growing in your garden or your neighborhood, you have access to one of the most powerful antiviral medicines in the world. Dried elderberries are made commercially into teas and tinctures. The best and easiest way to harness their flu-fighting power is to juice them (then cook the juice before consuming).

To make tasty elderberry pops, pick the elderberries at their ripest and rinse them in a colander. Put the clean berries in your blender, adding a bit of water, if needed, to get things going. Once you have the elderberry juice, put the juice in a nonreactive pot and cook it until it boils, then simmer for 15 minutes. Let the mixture cool, then fill ice cube trays about 3/4 full and freeze for an hour until firm enough to insert Popsicle sticks. Then let freeze until solid. If someone comes down with a summertime virus, have them suck on the deep red-purple pops and pretend they got them from the Good Humor man.

The chill will feel good on scratchy throats, and the elderberry will go to work fighting the flu bugs.

You can experiment with adding your children's favorite juices to the elderberry juice before freezing. If a virus hits during the colder months, dissolve a couple of elderberry cubes in a cup of warm or hot water, and sip the elixir to banish the bugs from your immune system. Keep in mind that elderberries are antiviral and not antibacterial, which means they work great for flus and anything else caused by a virus but are ineffective at combating ailments caused by bacteria.

Immune-Building Burdock Stew

Burdock is a nutritious herb that's great for the liver and skin. The root has cancer-protective properties. Carefully dig up a burdock root, taking pains to avoid the spiky, clingy seed pods. Gently scrub the root to remove the dirt—you can peel it if you wish, but it is not necessary—and cut it into slices, as you would a carrot. Add it to a pot with the liquid and any or all of the other ingredients listed.

- 6 to 8 cups water or mushroom broth
- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 summer squash, cubed
- 1 parsnip, peeled and sliced
- 1 carrot, sliced
- 1/2 cup mung beans (known as dal)
- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 slice dried astragalus
- 1 piece dried kombu
- Handful shiitake mushrooms, sliced
- Cinnamon, cardamom, turmeric, cumin, cloves, salt and/or fresh ginger to taste

1. Bring ingredients to a boil; simmer for 2 hours. For a creamier texture, you can remove half of the soup and blend it, returning it to the pot afterward.

2. Before serving, remove astragalus and kombu (if blending, remove these before you blend).

3. To make the dish more cooling in the summer months, serve with a toss of fresh cilantro and a squeeze of lime. SERVES 2

Simple Medicine: How to Make a Poultice

If you find yourself needing some herbal first aid, be it from wandering through your nettle patch, tripping on an errant stick in the back yard or having an accidental encounter with a kitchen knife, herbs will always come to your rescue. Poultices are a fast and easy first-aid option and have been around as long as humans could chew and spit. As with most herbal remedies, poultices can be as rudimentary or as fancy as time and your imagination allow.

The old-fashioned method involves picking some leaves, chewing them up, slapping the gob on the affected skin and covering it with whatever cloth is handy. As an alternative to gnashing the leaves with your pearly whites, you can easily bruise them with a mortar and pestle (be sure to add some water). If your need isn't an emergency, you can harvest the root, grind it into a fine powder, add warm water to make a paste, apply it to the skin and cover it with a warm hand towel and tie it with a cotton cloth to keep it all in place. This works especially great with comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*).

The beauty of a poultice is that it can be made in the field on the fly. Almost any broad, green leaf will work to some extent in soothing the skin and drawing out undesirable elements from the wound. Traditionally, comfrey poultices are used to heal bones, wounds and traumas to muscles and other tissues. Because it causes such rapid cell proliferation and healing, though, a comfrey poultice should never be applied to deep wounds or puncture wounds, as there is a possibility of the skin healing over an infection and sealing it in.

Plantain (*Plantago* spp.) also is a favorite poultice ingredient, both for its ubiquity and for its ability to soothe infections, eczema, rashes and even acne. Another wonderful ally is yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), the leaves of which can be used on deeper wounds. Ideally, a poultice should be kept on overnight and reapplied as often as necessary.

Simple Medicine: Bath Salts and Facial Steams

Some of the most enjoyable herbal remedies are for less-serious ailments. Use what you have in your garden to give yourself a much-needed dose of relaxation and decadence.

BATH SALTS. Pick any herbs with a high concentration of volatile oils to make medicinal bath salts. A mixture of rosemary and lavender will work well. After drying the herbs, add a few sprigs of each to a covered glass jar (approximately 40 ounces) filled with sea salt or Epsom salt. Store in a cool, dry place for about two weeks—longer if you wish—agitating them every once in a while. After the herbs have imparted their smell and oils to the salt, you can remove the sprigs. Pour 1 to 2 cups of the salt into a running bath, or use it as a body scrub.

FACIAL STEAM. Pick fresh flowers of calendula, lavender and stalks of rosemary and put them in a large glass bowl. Fill the bowl with boiling water and cover quickly with a towel. Set the bowl on a table or the floor and pull the towel over your head, making sure the towel is still covering three sides of the bowl. Lower your head until you are close enough to feel the herbal steam penetrating your skin, but not so close that it is uncomfortably hot. Breathe deeply and relax for 10 to 20 minutes. The steam will not only help to open the upper respiratory tract but it also will impart the medicinal qualities of the herbs to the skin on your face and neck, increasing circulation and enhancing your complexion. Enjoy.

JENNIFER RABIN is an herbalist and freelance writer living in Portland, Oregon.

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