

Detox your home, and yourself, with green cleaners

Lisa Iannucci For the Poughkeepsie Journal Published 11:21 a.m. ET June 9, 2016



(Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto)

Everyone wants to live in a clean home, and now that the weather is warm, it's time to give it a scrubbing, but put away the bottle of bleach to do the job. Today, harsh chemicals and noxious fumes have been replaced by more eco-friendly, non-toxic cleaners.

"Unlike past generations, we are now learning about the hazards of toxic cleaners and other chemicals being used in a myriad of household products, including food storage containers, textiles, sponges and even toothpaste," said Sheila Delson, CPO-CD of FREEDomain Concepts, LLC in Poughkeepsie.

"The chemical most commonly used in all these products is triclosan, more commonly known as Ultra Fresh, or Microban," Delson said. "It is a chlorinated compound that is used as an antibacterial agent, or disinfectant and can be found in almost any product that reads 'disinfectant' or 'kills germs.' "

Delson said the upside is these cleaning products are very effective, but the downside is the potential negative effects on the environment and humans when inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

According to the American Lung Association, many cleaning supplies irritate the eyes and the throat, or cause headaches or other health problems. Some products, such as aerosol spray products, air fresheners, chlorine bleach, rug and upholstery cleaners, furniture and floor polish release dangerous chemicals, including what's called volatile organic compounds or VOCs. These VOCs contribute to respiratory problems, allergic reactions and headaches.

There are several misconceptions about greener cleaning products, especially that they cost more than traditional products and aren't as effective.

"Homemade or store purchased eco-friendly products work just as well and are safer for our bodies and environment," said Kara Bohack, NRT Practitioner of Holistic Healing & Nutrition in Poughkeepsie. "Environmental toxins are a huge cause of disease. For example, I find chlorine toxicity in so many people. When we detox the chlorine, they start feeling better and are healthier."

Christine Burk, founder of Christine's Cleaning Services in Walkill, uses eco-friendly products when cleaning her clients' homes and uses HEPA filters, or high efficiency particulate air, filters that capture invisible particles that normal vacuums reject back into the air. She admits, however, that some cleaning projects require stronger products.

"For example, there's nothing non-toxic to use when stripping floors," Burk said. "Search online and find a company that makes non-toxic products and ask for samples. Don't use bleach or ammonia and find products that do not have caustic chemicals in them. Use baking soda to unclog sinks, it makes a volcano. I use a lot of essential oils mixed up with water, so when it goes on your clothes it's a good smell."

Speaking of good smells, Bohack uses essential oils to clean and deodorize her home.

"They can kill spores from anthrax, E.coli and a broad spectrum of bacteria," she said. "Lemon, orange or grapefruit essential oils are excellent for degreasing and release a wonderful clean aroma for the home."

She suggests a blend of cinnamon, clove and tea tree oil as best for the bathroom to deodorize; it also acts as an antibacterial spray at the same time. She also recommends making a cleaner – for anything, including glass — of equal parts water and white vinegar with 3-5 drops oregano oil and 7-15 drops of citrus essential oil.

Not only is there concern about the effect on our body when using chemical-based products, but Delson said there is also an apprehension that these cleaning chemicals are being deposited into our drinking water, lakes and streams.

"Research studies that confirm the potential health and environmental effects of toxic chemical cleansers are staggering," she said.

Delson recommends an integrated cleaning approach, using the big guns where needed and eco-friendly where appropriate.

"For big cleaning projects, I use standard household cleaners because they are not only an effective means to an end, they are also efficiently energy and time-saving," she said. "I recommend the 'big-guns' on a quarterly basis, then integrate the use of eco-friendly products for everyday and weekly maintenance."

She also recommends developing a daily and weekly schedule for household maintenance and sticking to it.

To kick off your summer cleaning projects, Robin Wilson, founder and CEO of Robin Wilson Home, author of "Clean Design: Wellness for Your Lifestyle" and an ambassador for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, said to start with your closets so you're not dumping everything into a room you've already cleaned.

"Closets are dust mite havens because of the clothing and junk that sits untouched for years and collects dust," Wilson said. "Empty it, trash what you don't need, and put it back together neatly and organized. Then take on the rest of the room."

Wilson also said to get rid of vinyl shower curtains because they hold mold more easily and off-gas.

"Use a nylon curtain instead," she said. "For fresh floors, get rid of wall-to-wall carpeting. Tile and hardwood floors are preferable, but don't forget to vacuum on a regular basis. Ensure that your vacuum has a HEPA filter to better manage dust particles in your home, especially since dust can be a leading trigger for allergic or asthma reactions."

When it comes to purchasing eco-friendly household cleaners, those certified by Green Seal contain no carcinogens, reproductive toxins or mutagens among other toxic compounds. Animal testing is discouraged and the packaging contains post-consumer content, and is recyclable or uses bags/pouches that reduce packaging.

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Tips for eco-friendly cleaning

Robin Wilson, author of "Clean Design: Wellness for Your Lifestyle," offers these additional cleaning tips:

- **Empty each room:** For the ultimate in cleaning, remove everything from each room as if you were moving, and mop or steam clean the floors. You'll be shocked at all the nastiness living underneath and behind furniture and appliances.
- **Lighten up the living room:** Consider using slipcovers on upholstered sofas which can be washed regularly and have come a long way from slipcovers of 10 years ago. Eliminate dust-catching drapes and horizontal blinds. Try washable rolling blinds or shutters instead.
- **Neaten up with the news:** Newsprint is a cousin to paper towels, but its high absorbency makes it more effective and will leave windows sparkling. Newspaper is also recyclable. But be careful: the one downside is wet ink can stain wood moldings so use extra caution. Use microfiber cloths instead of paper towels on floors, tile and countertops. They do a great job sanitizing and can be reused.
- **Mind the mold:** Hot spots to look for mold buildup are dishwashers, the water pan under the fridge, and sink and bath drains. Change water dispenser and ice-maker filters while you're at it.
- **Take care of toys:** Wash or freeze stuffed animals to kill dust mites. Keep all toys, games and stuffed animals in sealed bins when not being used.
- **Breathe easy in bed:** Switch to hypoallergenic pillows and comforters. Make sure and wash pillow cases, pillow protectors and mattress protectors on a regular basis to protect against dust mites.
- **Pick non-VOC paint:** Use non-VOC paints which won't off gas or leave an obnoxious odor and stir up asthma or allergies. It looks just the same on your wall.

On the web

www.robinwilsonhome.com (<http://www.robinwilsonhome.com/>)

www.cleandesignbook.com (<http://www.cleandesignbook.com/>)

American Lung Association: <http://www.lung.org/search-results.html?q=cleaning%20supplies> (<http://www.lung.org/search-results.html?q=cleaning%20supplies>)

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