

## The Air Freshener Myth

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In the last column I talked about common household myths. It led me to research a variety of household chemicals we use routinely. What myths are associated with some of these chemicals and what can we do to protect ourselves?

This week let's talk about commercial air fresheners.

Something smell a little off? Pull that can of aerosol from the cupboard and give the air a shot. Ah, that's better. Or is it? There are two problems here. The first is that we are masking an odor we don't like. Unless the odors we don't like are obvious and temporary, we could be masking smells in the home that are trying to tell us something. This could be a mold issue, an electrical problem, a pest presence, or a lack of air circulation.

The second problem is that if you are using an air freshener – either an aerosol or one of the units that releases a scent, you are filling your home with pollutants. Manufacturers create these scents using chemicals that combine to create formaldehyde, a carcinogen (cancer producing), petroleum distillate (an oil – flammable), and p-dichlorobenzene, an eye and throat irritant. Aerosol versions also contain butane or propane. And “secret formula” designs for air fresheners (like the plug-ins) include multiple chemicals that are not named on the can or package.

Right now you are probably asking yourself how is it possible for something so bad to be sold to consumers. I don't have a good answer for you. The consumer marketplace is profit driven, and often we have to assume the “buyer beware” motto. This is one of the reasons that the saying “automatic air fresheners are a nice addition to any room” is a myth.

It's difficult to know where to turn. Because there are no standards for air fresheners, my advice is to be careful and consider some of the following natural solutions.

- Buy some plants and open the windows. After checking your home for causes of bad smells (mold, pests, water intrusion, leaking fireplace, electrical overheating, etc.) fresh air and natural air purifiers – plants – are a great way to stay sweet smelling. If you have a highly insulated home and do not have a fresh air exchanger – called an ERV (“Energy Recovery Ventilator”) – you should consider installing one if you do not like opening windows.

- Essential oil diffusing. Many essential oils have antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral properties. Boil a pot of water, take it off the heat and add a few drops of essential oil such as lemon or eucalyptus. The scent of the oil will infuse the house.
- Cook some vanilla. Place a capful of vanilla in a small oven proof dish or cup and bake at 300 degrees for 30 minutes. Leave it in the oven for an hour. This is a great trick if you have guests coming over, or buyers on a walk through.
- Put a teaspoon of baking soda, a teaspoon of lemon juice, and 3 drops of an essential oil in 2 cups of hot water. Stir, allow to cool, then pour this into a spray bottle. Shake well before use.
- Don't want to go to so much trouble? There are some ready to go versions available on Amazon. Some of the names you can search for are Eco-Me, Aura Cacia, MoSo Natural Air, and Lac Larde Organic.

Now you know.