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How to Choose Natural Cleaning Products

Recognizing harmful chemicals & making safe, eco-friendly choices when buying natural cleaning products

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Walk down the modern cleaning aisle in your local grocery store and you're

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more than likely to see a variety of natural cleaning products options. But beware! Greenwashing abounds with many toxic household products masquerading as eco cleaning options. Knowing how to spot the most harmful chemicals in cleaning products is an important skill to have if you want to reduce the harmful effects on babies and pets and other members of your household, while also doing your part to protect the environment.

Photo credit: Flickr –Peppysis / judith511 / Piccadilly Pink









Harmful Chemicals to Avoid when Shopping for Natural Cleaning Products

The most important thing to do when shopping for natural cleaning products is to look at the ingredient list. Harmful chemicals used in conventional cleaning products can cause skin and eye irritation, contribute to asthma, cause headaches, dizziness and fatigue, disrupt hormonal systems, and even cause cancer. Plus, scientists have yet to really study what they do to the environment when they flow into our rivers and streams and react with one another. So here are the most dangerous ingredients you should avoid when shopping for cleaners free of toxins:



- Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs)
- Ammonia
- Ammonium quaternary compounds
- Benzene
- Butyl cellosolve (ethylene glycol, butyl glycol, or monobutyl)
- Cresol
- Diethanolamine (DEA)
- d-limonene
- Hydrochloric acid (chlorine or bleach)
- Kerosene
- Monoethanolamine (MEA)
- Morpholine
- Naphtha
- Nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs)

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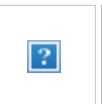



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- Organic solvents
- Petroleum distillates
- Phthalates
- Sodium hydroxide (lye or caustic soda)
- Sulfuric acid
- Triethanolamine (TEA)
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) like formaldehyde and artificial fragrances (yes, air fresheners included)

With this information, you can make informed decisions about the harmful chemicals in cleaning products you buy to create your own natural cleaning products kit. Get all of the details of why you should avoid each of these harmful chemicals through [Healthy Child Healthy World](#).

Other Tips for Finding Natural Cleaning Products

In general, if the label doesn't include a list of ingredients, put it back on the shelf until you can confirm what it contains. If you're unsure, check out the US Department of Health and Human Services' [Household Products Database](#).

Even if there is an ingredient list present, you'll want to ensure there's a disclaimer saying that *all* of the components have been listed (sometimes they hide the most incriminating ones). That said, there are those days when you're in need of a cleaning solution now and you can't wait, in which case you should follow these tips for buying more natural cleaning products:

- Avoid products with words like "poison," "warning," or "danger." "Caution" may or may not be safe.
- Avoid products that are "combustible" or "flammable" or have warnings about heating the product.
- Avoid non-specific ingredient phrases like "surfactants" or "inert ingredients" or "dispersal agents" as these do not tell you whether there are toxins in the product or not.
- Avoid ingredients that contain "chlor," "phenol," or "glycol" as part of their

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name or that end with “-ene.”

- Avoid vague claims of biodegradability; in order to be green they need to be “readily biodegradable” as in a couple of days rather than years.

And remember that you should look for cruelty-free products to ensure other critters of our planet have not been tortured to bring you cleaning power. Seek out products with these logos:



Leaping Bunny Logo



Certified Vegan Logo

Eco-friendly Homemade Cleaning Products

Of course, if you're looking for ways to clean greener but don't want to spend the money on commercial options, you can learn to make your own eco-friendly homemade cleaning products and [air fresheners](#). Recipes with really basic ingredients like [baking soda](#), vinegar, lemon juice, and castile soap are safe and eco-friendly.

About the Author:

Maryruth has been seeking the keys to environmental justice - both at home and at work - for over a decade. Growing up adjacent to wild spaces, Maryruth developed a healthy respect (and whimsical appreciation) for things non-human, but her practical mind constantly draws her down to earth to ponder tangible solutions to complex eco-problems. With interests that range from green living to green business, sustainable building designs to organic gardening practices, ecosystem restoration to environmental health, Maryruth has been exploring and writing about earth-matters for most of her

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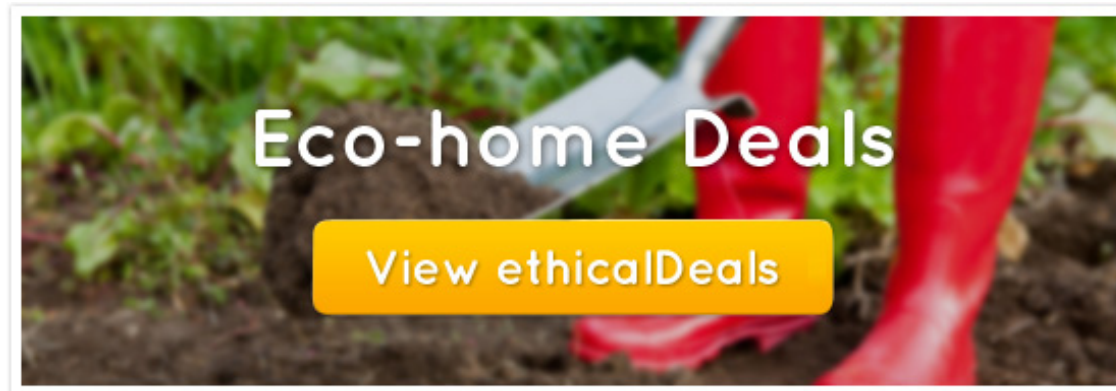
life. Of special interest is the subject of ecopsychology and the role the natural world plays in the long-term health and well-being of humanity. You can learn more about Maryruth's work by [visiting her site](#).

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