

GREEN CLEANING PRODUCTS

Cleaning is the process of removing soil, stains, or undesirable microorganisms from surfaces and restoring that surface to its original condition as possible. Cleaning plays an essential role in our daily lives by providing important public health benefits to consumers by keeping our surroundings clean, protected and free of germs.

Environmental groups, state legislators, the EPA, and the cleaning products industry are all working together to improve the products that you use every day. While “green cleaning” has only been fashionable for the last decade or so, researchers have been steadily working on developing environmentally sound cleaning products for more than 50 years.

The cleaning products industry has known and understood the importance of biodegradable cleaning products since the 1950s. In the 1970s, the industry removed all CFCs from aerosols. In the 1990s, products became more concentrated (“ultras”) which reduced packaging. (Think of your laundry detergent and dishwashing soap – wash more loads with less detergent) Cleaning products have been getting “greener” through innovation and continuous improvement – long before the “green” movement was even around!

“Green” products are lining store shelves, and the Internet is abuzz with tips for green living and step-by-step instructions for making your own “earth-friendly” household cleaning products. But does homemade always mean “green”? Is green always safer? The amount of information out there can be overwhelming.

So what does it mean to be a green cleaning product? The green product should be effective and have the same cleaning power as other chemically infused products. Natural cleaning products should be made with plant- and mineral-based products such as essential oils and coconut based cleaners, use biodegradable ingredients and never be tested on animals. Green cleaners provide cleaning power without harsh chemical fumes of residue. A rule of thumb when looking for a green cleaner is to look at the list of ingredients. The fewer number of ingredients listed is actually better. It is also best if the ingredients listed are mostly ‘plant-based materials.’

Green Seal, a private non-profit company, offers an independent verification program that insures products are in compliance with the green seal standard. Products are tested for environmental stewardship, performance as well as quality control procedures.

If the product meets the standards, the Green Seal logo will be on the product and can be used in advertising, promotional materials, catalogs and in product descriptions.

In January 2010 voluntary guidelines were put into place to insure the industry discloses more about product ingredients. These guidelines are known as the Ingredient Communication Initiative. Some ingredients will still not be included and can be folded under such categories as “fragrance” or “preservatives.” The new initiative was developed to help consumers make informed decisions about the products they use in and around their homes.

This information may be provided to consumers in one or more of the following ways:

- Product label
- Manufacturer’s website
- Toll-free number
- Other non-electronic means, to assist those who do not have access to the Internet.

Ingredients on cleaning and other consumer products included in the Initiative will be listed in descending order of predominance.



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Household cleaning product ingredients with a concentration greater than one percent (1%) will be listed “in descending order of predominance,” with the ingredient present in the highest quantity listed first. Ingredients present in low concentrations equal to or less than one percent can be listed in any order.

Key Terms

In order to understand what green cleaning products are used for consumers need to be familiar with some key terms. These terms are words that can be seen directly on product labeling at the store and other places where products are sold.

- **Cleaning Products** – Cleaning products as defined in this document refer to products that are used for the routine cleaning of the indoor built environment. They include but are not limited to: glass cleaners, general-purpose cleaners, floor cleaners, laundry detergents, dishwashing detergents, deodorizers, hand soaps, and wax strippers.
- **Concentrate** – A product that is intended to be diluted with water.
- **Concentrated Form** – The product as it is packaged and sold for use.
- **Disinfectant** - A product that has received EPA registration based upon claims to kill bacteria, viruses, or other microorganisms. For purposes of this standard, the word disinfectant includes “sanitizer”, “disinfectant” and “sterilant.”
- **Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s)** – The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a government agency concerned with the American environment and its impact on human health. It was founded in 1970 under Richard Nixon in response to growing environmental concerns among Americans, and often works with other agencies to achieve optimal results.
- **General Purpose Cleaners** – Cleaning products used for routine cleaning of hard surfaces including floors. It does not include any EPA registered sterilizers, disinfectants or sanitizers.
- **Glass and Surface Cleaners** – Cleaning products used to clean windows, glass, mirrors, Plexiglas and similar surfaces. It does not include any EPA registered sterilizers, disinfectants or sanitizers.
- **Green Seal** – is an independent, non-profit organization that uses science based standards as the power of the marketplace to create a more sustainable world.
- **Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS)** – a written or printed material concerning a hazardous chemical that contains the information set forth in the OSHA Hazard Communication Standard.
- **Pollutant** – any substance that directly or indirectly creates an adverse human health or environmental effect when introduced into any environmental media.
- **Recyclable Package** – A package that can be diverted from the wastestream through available processes or programs, and can be collected, processed and returned to be used as a raw material or product.
- **Toxicology** – Study of adverse effects of chemical, biological agents, and physical agents on living organisms.
- **Toxicity** – The inherent ability of a chemical, biological, or physical agent to cause adverse effects in living organisms.



Green Cleaning Options

There are a variety of ways that green products can be evaluated. Below is brief overview of those options which consumers need to take into consideration when purchasing green products.

Final Note

Cleaning products are designed to be safe for consumers, their families and the environment when used as directed. Always read instructions on cleaning products before using, and follow usage instructions carefully. Remember, each product’s instructions can be different: but in general, always follow these basic guidelines:

- Store all household cleaning products in a secure location, out of the reach of children and pets.
- Don’t mix cleaning products – irritating (or potentially toxic) fumes could result.
- Keep products in their original containers with the labels intact.
- Cleaning products are intended for external use only. Refer to the product label for emergency information if a cleaning product is swallowed, comes in contact with eyes or if irritating fumes from combined chemicals are

inhaled.

- In an emergency situation, call the U.S. Poison Control Center's national toll-free hotline at 1-800-222-1222, or call the number listed on the product label.

So what should we keep in mind when we consider purchasing environmentally safe cleaning products for our homes? Safety!

To ensure you are buying environmentally safe cleaning products that are actually safe, look for these basic qualifications:

- Nontoxic
- No harmful fumes
- Hypoallergenic
- No volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- Formulated without hazardous chemicals such as:
Kerosene, Phenol, Cresol, Lye, Hydrochloric acid, Sulfuric acid, Sulfamic acid, Petroleum distillates, Ammonia, Sodium hydroxide, Butyl cellosolve, Phosphoric acid, Formaldehyde, Chlorine bleach or Morpholine.

Effectiveness!

Some good quality, environmentally safe cleaning products have been proven to be every bit, if not more effective than their caustic counterparts. Look for products that offer proof of effectiveness through third party testing.

Make Sure They're Really Green!

- Make sure they are made from sustainable ingredients from natural sources.
- Biodegradable surfactants that break down in a short period of time rather than years!
- Recyclable packaging! Check the bottom of the package for recycling that is available in your area!
- Recyclable wipes.
- Recyclable dryer sheets.
- No chlorine bleach.
- No phosphates.
- No nitrates.
- No borates.
- No volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- No animal testing.



Concentrates!

One of the easiest, most environmentally friendly and economical things you can do is to buy concentrates.

Think about it. You may not have considered how much you are paying for water in a bottle of cleaner. Water in cleaners is the MOST EXPENSIVE WATER you can buy! Not only are you paying a high price for this basic first ingredient, you are also paying to

- ship the water,
- package the water and
- store the water.

Each of these steps adds tremendously to the pollution problem. Why not add your own water, in reusable bottles, at a fraction of the cost? By adding our own tap water we save emissions, landfill space and energy.

Resources and References:

<http://www.aboutcleaningproducts.com>

<http://www.cleaninginstitute.org>

http://www.walgreens.com/store/catalog/Cleaners/Natural-All-Purpose-Cleaner/ID=prod5483952-product?V=G&ec=frgl_&ci_src=14110944&ci_sku=sku5482819

<http://www.coastwidelabs.com/Technical%20Articles/Green%20Cleaning%20Glossary.htm>

<http://www.healthy-kids-go-green.com/safe-cleaning-products.html>