

Toxics Free Home

In a world full of toxics--- where the air is loaded with toxic emissions from vehicles, industries, power plants; where the water is contaminated with sewage, industrial effluents, chemicals; and the land is littered with garbage, plastics; even the plastic toys our children play with are not free of toxics, they contain potentially carcinogenic chemicals, we need to make our small world, that is our homes, **toxics free**.

Many toxic chemicals have not been adequately tested for their potential to cause long term effects. Frequent exposure to certain pesticides, solvents may increase the risk of developing cancer, leukemia, respiratory illness. Some are even suspected of causing reproductive problems, birth defects and genetic defects.



Since the risks are still unknown, the best thing that one can do is to minimise the use and exposure to chemicals, atleast in our homes. Remember, there are no "safe" and "acceptable" levels of toxic pollution. The only safe level of toxics in our community and home is **zero**.

We are so dependent on chemicals in our every day lives that even the thought of switching over to an alternative seems inconvenient. But with a determined and conscious effort we can easily cut down on our consumption of chemicals. Here are a few alternatives for the non toxic home.

• House cleaning alternatives

Baking Soda: Cleans and deodorizes. Good scrubbing powder. Softens water, increasing the cleaning power of soap.

Borax: Cleans, deodorizes and disinfects. Softens water.

Soap: They are animal or plant-based compounds unlike detergents which are derived from non-renewable petroleum products. Biodegrades safely without polluting water.

Washing soda: Disinfectant. Cuts grease and removes stains.

White Vinegar: Cuts grease.

• Make your own house cleaners

All Purpose Cleaner: Mix 2 teaspoons borax, 1 teaspoon soap and 1 quarter water. Store in a spray bottle. Add vinegar or washing soda to cut grease.

Disinfectant: Dissolve ¼ cup borax in ½ gallon (2 litres) of hot water.

Scrubbing Powder: Use a firm bristle brush and scrub with soap combined with either borax, table salt or baking soda.

Kitchen: Use liquid or powdered soap. Don't use detergents.

Homemade insecticide : For storing rice, pulses, wheat put a few neem leaves or turmeric or dry red chilly in the jar or bag in which they are stored. Do not use chemicals.

Oven: Avoid spills and overfilling pans. Clean with steel wool, washing soda and water. Provide plenty of fresh air.

Brass: Mix equal parts of salt and flour with a little vinegar, then rub. Rub lemon rind or tamarind with salt.

Copper: Rub with lemon juice and salt or warm vinegar and salt.

Silver or Stainless Steel: Rub with a paste of baking soda and water. Apply some tooth paste on the silver object and leave it on till it dries (approx. 15 min.) and then wash.

Bathroom: Tub, Tile and Toilet-Scrub with powdered soap and a scrubbing powder made of baking soda, borax or table salt. Use white vinegar to loosen lime deposits.

Windows and Mirrors: Mix 3 tablespoons vinegar with 1 quarter warm water. For tough jobs, first wash glass with warm soapy water.

• Laundry

Detergent: When you first switch from detergents to soap, wash laundry once with washing soda alone to get rid of detergent residue and avoid yellowing of fabric. After that, add 1/3 cup washing soda to 1 bucket of water before placing clothes in machine and substitute soap flakes or powder for detergent. For more cleaning power, add ½ cup borax.



Fabric Softener: Add 1 cup vinegar or ¼ cup baking soda during final rinse.

Pre-soak: Soak heavily soiled items in warm water with ½ cup washing soda for 30 minutes. Rub soiled areas with liquid soap.

Spray starch: Dissolve 2 teaspoons cornstarch in 1 pint cold water in a spray bottle. Shake before each use.

Dry cleaning: Commonly used dry cleaning solvents are toxic. Buy clothing you can wash. Many garments labelled “dry clean only” can be safely hand-washed using mild soap and cold water and send out for pressing. If you must dry clean, do so as little as possible and air clothing before bringing it indoors.

Diapers: Use cloth diapers rather than disposables or so called “degradables”.

• Household Pest & Pesticides: “Chemicals that can kill insects can also kill you”

Ants: Sprinkle turmeric powder to get rid of ants. To prevent an ant invasion, first block cracks and other entry points tightly. To get rid of ants, lay out a line of boric acid (can be mixed with sugar) along the ant’s path or sprinkle (or use an old squeeze bottle) behind areas such as ovens, sinks, washers and toilets. If you have carpenter ants, try to locate and remove their nest. Drill holes in the wood they are attacking and fill the holes with boric acid.

Cockroaches: Block all cracks along baseboards, shelves, cupboards, pipes, sinks. Eliminate moisture. Apply a light dust of boric acid. Allow 2 weeks for these methods to take effect.

Mice and Rats: Keep storage areas clean and tidy and seal holes in walls and around pipes. Use “live” traps that do not harm the animals.

Moths: Avoid mothballs and flakes because they are made of toxic chemicals. Clean garments thoroughly before storing them in a sealed closet, bag, trunk or other container since moths are attracted to the dirt on clothes. During the year, clean closets regularly to get rid of moth’s food sources.

Spiders: In general, leave spiders alone- they eat other insects. Remove webs with a broom.



Lawn and Garden Pests: In general, healthy lawns start with healthy, living soils. Keep the soil well aerated and fertilised with compost and other natural fertilisers. Use planting materials and varieties which are adapted to your regional climate and can resist pests. For lawns select seed mixtures that will suppress weeds, resist disease and are adapted to the local climatic conditions. Water early in the day to conserve water (which evaporates under a hot sun) and prevent disease outbreaks.

Mosquitoes repellent: Burn a few leaves of Neem or coconut husk to drive away the mosquitoes. Don’t let water logging around your homes, keep the drains clean.

Note: The above information has been adapted from “*Stepping lightly on the Earth: A minimum impact guide to the Home*” by Greenpeace International”, with minor changes and additions.