

Green and clean

Keep your house clean without the chemical overkill

Bridget Gardner gives us her four step plan to green cleaning



If you believed the advertisements on TV the only way to have a safe, clean home for your family is by constantly applying cleaning products and disinfectants to your benches, floors and walls. However, spraying, wiping and flushing all these products around the home could amount to a chemical cocktail. Research has linked exposure to chemicals from ultra-cleanliness with health problems such as asthma. Chemicals also leave a toxic trail after their use when they go down the drain into sewage, are released into the air or the packaging ends up in landfill.

How to clean green?

According to Bridget Gardner from FreshGreen-Clean there are four easy steps to green cleaning: wipe it, soak it, add it, and dry it.

“Most of the cleaning is achieved with the action of wiping the surface with a damp cloth or mop, there is often no need to add a product” says Bridget.

“Water is a very effective cleaning agent so soak stubborn grime and stains before cleaning. If there are any trouble spots left then add a non-toxic cleaning agent such as bicarbonate of soda and pure soap, or use a stronger tool such as a scrubbing brush, toothbrush, painter’s razor blade or my favourite, scourers made from orange net-bags tied into a knot,” adds Bridget.

After cleaning shiny surfaces with these methods, Bridget recommends a quick polish with a flannelette rag or a microfibre glass cloth to avoid the toxic solvents found in many glass or surface cleaners, and open your windows to let in the fresh air.

“A clean and dry surface will deter bacteria growth, and UV rays are a natural disinfectant, so hang your cloths and mops outside to dry,” says Bridget.

Products

When choosing cleaning products, read the labels and avoid products that contain health warnings, caution or poison phrases. Alternatively, use non-toxic materials such as bicarbonate of soda, white vinegar and pure vegetable oil soap.

If you are planning to use wastewater from the laundry in the garden, avoid laundry detergents that are high in sodium and phosphorus. The build up of sodium in the soil can have a detrimental effect on your garden. As a general rule laundry liquids have lower sodium content than powders. Lanfax Labs has conducted independent research on over 90 brands of laundry liquid and powders by listing their sodium and phosphorus levels.

Water usage

It is not just the build up of chemicals that you need to be careful about, a lot of cleaning products and methods also use vast amounts of water. Bridget recommends that rather than rinsing your cleaning cloth continuously under running water, have a small bucket of water handy to rinse your cloth.

“As high-quality microfibre cloths not only reduce or eliminate the need for a cleaning product, less water is required to rinse the surface or the cleaning cloths,” says Bridget.

Design for green cleaning

One of the best ways to clean green is to eliminate the need for cleaning in the first place. There are a number of clever ways to design your home so that it cuts down on the cleaning workload.

Dick Clarke from Envirotecture designs bathrooms that need very little cleaning. “The trick is to design a bathroom without silicon, and to eliminate shower screen frames and fittings. By taking away the things that harbour dirt and grime you eliminate the need for cleaning.”

The Envirotecture bathroom design that reduces the need for cleaning.



Dick makes shower screens from a single piece of frameless glass embedded into the floor and wall tiles, as if it was another large tile. The waterproof membrane sits invisibly behind the tiles, and all you see is tiles, grout and glass; no silicone is required. This makes regular cleaning without harsh chemicals very easy, and there’s never any mould build-up. It looks really chic too!

“Ideally you want to have a shower enclosure that has no doors and a large enough space to capture the water spray. While this may not work if you have a really small bathroom, you can still use unframed glass so there are no places around the edge of the glass to house mould and grime,” says Dick.

Bridget also recommends using large sheets of glass and that the bathroom has a window that can be opened. She also suggests locating the fan above the shower, not in the middle of the room.

“And if you are going to go down the tile path make them as large as possible and ideally stain the grout,” says Bridget.

Green cleaning tips

- Clean regularly to avoid the build up of dirt and the need for toxic cleaners.
- Wipe down surfaces or dishes with a microfibre cloth or a cloth and warm soapy water.
- Let in sunshine and fresh air to help kill bacteria and grime.
- Check the sodium and phosphorus content of washing detergents.
- Reduce the amount of cleaning product you use.

For more information:

Your Home
www.yourhome.gov.au

Lanfax Labs
www.lanfaxlabs.com.au

Total Environment Centre
www.tec.org.au/dev/safersolutions

FreshGreenClean
www.freshgreenclean.com.au