

# HEALTHIER LIVING STARTS AT HOME

Safer Cleaning Practices to  
Reduce Your Exposure to Toxics

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DEPARTMENT OF  
**ECOLOGY**  
State of Washington

# Keep Your Space Healthier

How can you reduce your exposure to toxic chemicals? Start at home with simple changes to your cleaning practices.

## Improve indoor air quality

For cleaner indoor air:

- Open windows to increase ventilation — but only when weather and safety allows.
- Invest in an air purifier with a HEPA filter, or choose a filter with a [high MERV rating](#)<sup>1</sup> for your HVAC system. The higher the MERV rating, the better the filter is at trapping air pollutants.

## Leave shoes at the door

Our shoes can track toxic chemicals such as [arsenic and lead](#)<sup>2</sup> into our living spaces.

- Use a mat to reduce the amount of contaminants coming into your home.
- Set up a designated place by the door for your family and guests to leave their shoes.

## Vacuum and dust frequently

Toxic chemicals can gather in dust and soft materials such as carpets.

- Frequently wipe surfaces with [microfiber](#)<sup>3</sup> or damp cloths to remove dust.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to capture all the small particles. This is especially important to protect children and pets who spend more time on the floor.





# Choose Safer Cleaning Products

## Shop smarter

Whether you're buying cleaners or the ingredients to make them, check what you already have at home. If you buy only what you need, you won't have to store extra products. In addition to helping the environment, this can save you money. If you no longer need a product, check your local garbage service, call 1-800-RECYCLE, or visit [1800recycle.wa.gov](http://1800recycle.wa.gov) for safe disposal options.

## Shop safer



**Don't** buy products with the signal words **Danger** or **Poison**.



Try to **avoid** products with the words **Warning** or **Caution**.



**Choose safer products** with third-party certifications like these:



**Safer Choice**<sup>4</sup>  
Safer for people,  
pets, and the planet.



**Design for the Environment**<sup>5</sup>  
Safer disinfectants  
and sanitizers.



**Cradle to Cradle**<sup>6</sup>  
Visit their website to search  
for products, preferably  
platinum- or gold-certified.



## Look for products labeled fragrance free.<sup>7</sup>

The terms fragrance free and unscented aren't the same.

- **Unscented** products may contain undisclosed harmful chemicals that mask odors from other ingredients.
- **Fragrance free** means neither fragrances nor masking scents are used in the product.



# Do-It-Yourself Recipes

You can make your own cleaners that are safer for everyone. The ingredients are inexpensive and easy to find, plus you'll help protect your community and the environment by reducing sources of toxic chemicals.

## Multi-purpose cleaner

Let the spray rest for 5 minutes on the surface (called **dwelling time**) before wiping.

### Ingredients

- 1 Tablespoon liquid dish soap (not detergent)
- ½ cup white distilled vinegar
- 1½ cups water

### Directions

Add all ingredients to a clean 16-ounce spray bottle. Put on the cap and shake well.

## Glass cleaner

Use the multi-purpose cleaner recipe. Spray the cleaner on the surface and rub with a lint-free rag.

Or use this recipe:

### Ingredients

- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 cup water

### Directions

Mix in a spray bottle, spray on glass surface, and wipe away.

For outdoor windows, use a sponge and wash with warm water and a few drops of liquid dish soap. Rinse well and squeegee dry.





# Use Cleaners Safely

Protect your loved ones by cleaning when they're out of the room. Carefully read and follow the directions on all your cleaners before you use them. Be aware of the hazards associated with the product and follow recommended precautions. After using cleaning products, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.

## Ovens

Don't use this cleaner on self-cleaning ovens.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup baking soda
- Water

### Directions

Mix baking soda with enough water to make a paste. Apply to oven surfaces and let stand for 10–15 minutes before scrubbing. Use a scouring pad for problem areas and a spatula to get under large food deposits. You may need to scrub hard, but baking soda is not toxic to you, your family, or your pets.

## Microwaves

### Ingredients

- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup white distilled vinegar
- 1 cup water

### Directions

Mix vinegar and water in a microwave-safe container. Boil in the microwave. Let cool. The steam will loosen caked-on food, making it easier to clean.



## Tubs, sinks, and toilet bowls

### Ingredients

- Baking soda
- Liquid dish soap (not detergent)

### Directions

You can use baking soda in place of your scouring powder. Sprinkle it on porcelain fixtures and rub with a wet rag. Add a little soap to the rag for more cleaning power. Rinse well with water to avoid leaving a hazy film.

For the toilet bowl, sprinkle the baking soda inside the bowl. Add a few drops of the soap and scrub with a toilet brush. Finish the outside surfaces with a rag sprinkled with baking soda.

## Linoleum, tile, and woodwork

### Ingredients

- Liquid dish soap (not detergent)

### Directions

Squeeze a drop of soap on a wet washcloth and rub briskly. A washcloth will last longer and create less waste than a sponge.



## No-wax floors

### Ingredients

- ½ cup white distilled vinegar
- ½ gallon warm water

### Directions

Mop floors with vinegar and water. No need to rinse! Just be sure to wring out your mop well—your floors should dry quickly.

## Molds

### Ingredients

- 1 Tablespoon liquid laundry detergent
- 1½ cups warm water

### Directions

Mix laundry detergent and water in a spray bottle. Spray on hard surfaces and scrub off all the mold, then let the solution dry completely.

Learn more about cleaning and preventing mold on the [Department of Health's website](#).<sup>8</sup>



## For More Information

Want to learn more? Check out these helpful webpages or contact us for more details!

- [How do you know what's safe?](#)<sup>9</sup>
- [Choose safer products](#)<sup>10</sup>
- [Cleaning fact sheet](#)<sup>11</sup>
- [Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting](#)<sup>12</sup>

**Scan this QR code** with your smartphone camera for more about safer products & toxic chemicals in your home:



## Contact

Safer Chemicals Team:  
[Safer.Chem@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Safer.Chem@ecy.wa.gov)  
360-407-6700



## Image Credits

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## Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-merv-rating>
- 2 <https://ecology.wa.gov/HealthyActions>
- 3 <https://deohs.washington.edu/sites/default/files/brochures/microfiber-factsheet.pdf>
- 4 <https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice/products>
- 5 <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-labels/dfe-certified-disinfectants>
- 6 <https://c2ccertified.org/certified-products-and-materials>
- 7 <https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice/safer-choice-criteria-fragrance-free-products>
- 8 <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold>
- 9 <https://ecology.wa.gov/Blog/Posts/June-2020/Safer-Choice-Because-you-shouldn-t-need-a-PhD-to-k>
- 10 <https://kingcountyhazwastewa.gov/en/households-disposal/households-safer-home-products>
- 11 <https://resources.oshce.uw.edu/1s6jug8/>
- 12 <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/bleach.aspx>