

Cleaning Green

How to make natural cleaning products

Missy Keenan, Special to the Register 2:49 p.m. CST February 11, 2015



When it comes to cleaning products, I'm kind of a delicate flower. Strong chemical smells make me gag, and the fumes give me a headache long after the rest of my family has stopped noticing them.

To avoid harsh chemicals, I find myself spending a ridiculous amount of money on natural cleaning products at stores like Whole Foods. I wanted to try making homemade cleaning products, so I turned to local sustainable living consultant and author Linda Mason Hunter for guidance.

I decided to clean our house's bathrooms with recipes from Hunter's book "Green Clean: The Environmentally Sound Guide to Cleaning Your Home." The recipes were easy to make and featured simple ingredients, most of which I already had in my cupboard — baking soda, distilled white vinegar, Castile soap, essential oil and tea tree oil.

Mirror, countertop, and shower stall: I added ½ cup distilled white vinegar to two cups water in a spray bottle and cleaned as I would with any spray cleaner. Hunter said this will keep for months.

Toilet: First I sprinkled baking soda in the toilet right from the box, cleaned with the toilet brush, and flushed. Then I poured vinegar in a spray bottle, sprayed that in the bowl, again cleaned with the brush, then flushed.

This two-part process takes a little longer, but it's necessary to prevent a chemical reaction between the baking soda and vinegar — unless you're hoping to turn your toilet into a volcano for the science fair.

Sink and tub: For my sinks and tub, I used a homemade version of Soft Scrub from Hunter's book. I mixed ½ cup baking soda with enough liquid Castile soap (I used Dr. Bronner's unscented) to blend into a paste, scrubbed using a sponge, and rinsed well. This is Hunter's favorite recipe; she said commercial Soft Soap will redden your hands, but her version is very mild.

Mildew remover: I made a spray using a drop of tea tree oil in a cup of water and used it to clean problem areas in my shower. I've only used this a couple of times, so I don't know yet whether it will control mold and mildew long term. But because commercial mold and mildew removers are especially noxious, I plan to continue using this one and am crossing my fingers it does the trick.

Essential oil air freshener: Although I don't like chemical or artificial fragrances, I love a small dose of natural essential oil. I usually buy peppermint-scented spray from Aura Cacia, but it's pretty expensive at about \$7 for a four-ounce bottle.

I filled my empty Aura Cacia bottle with water, and then added a few drops of peppermint essential oil. It works great — there was no difference from the commercial product.

Hunter said she doesn't use essential oils in her products much anymore, and praises the benefits of open windows for making a house smell good.

"When I walk into my house, I don't really smell anything, and that's the way I like it," she said. "I crave fresh air and daylight, and open the windows when I can. It's great to breathe that air, it's better than any medicine."

Overall I'm thrilled with these products. They work great, smell great and don't give me a headache. The recipes were easy to make and will save me money, and reusing containers will reduce my environmental impact.

It might be going too far to say that I now enjoy cleaning my bathrooms, but making my own cleaning products has definitely improved the experience.

LEARN MORE

For more information, check out the following resources from Linda Mason Hunter:

HER BOOKS

- "The Healthy Home"
- "Green Clean: The Environmentally Sound Guide to Cleaning Your Home" (from which the recipes in this article are taken)
- "Three Green Rats — An Eco Tale" (Hunter's first children's book)

HER BLOG

- [The Green Zone](#), featuring green info and home ecology tips.

HER RADIO SHOW

- "The Green Zone" on KFMG 99.1 FM — featuring 2-to-3-minute tips — airs daily at 6:45-6:50 a.m., 4:45-4:50 p.m., 9:45-9:50 p.m. and 3:45-3:50 a.m.

ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP WEBSITE

- If you want to know what ingredients are in your commercial cleaning products, or any other consumer products, Hunter recommends the [Environmental Working Group website](#).