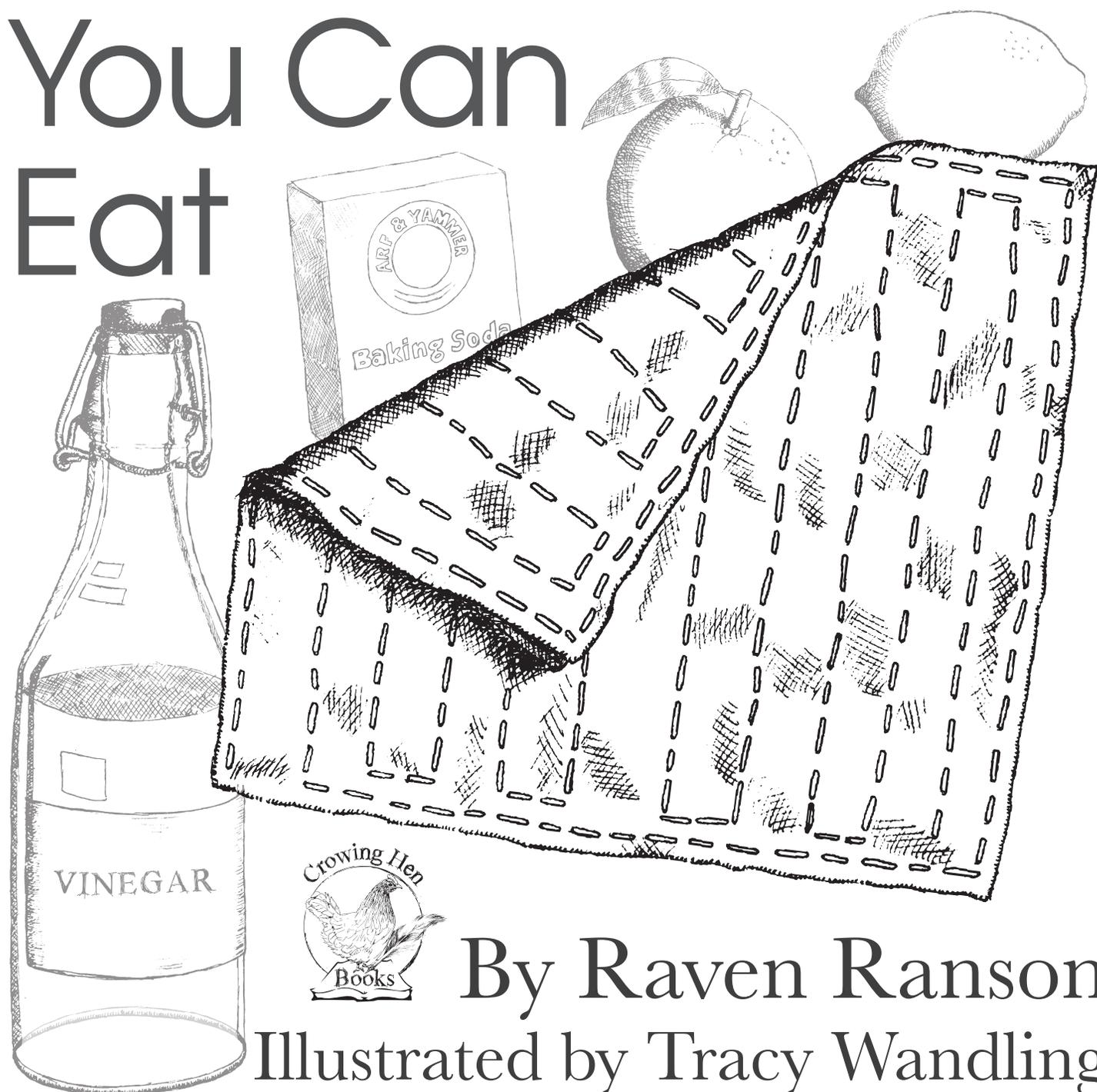


CLEAN

with Cleaners

You Can

Eat



By Raven Ranson

Illustrated by Tracy Wandling

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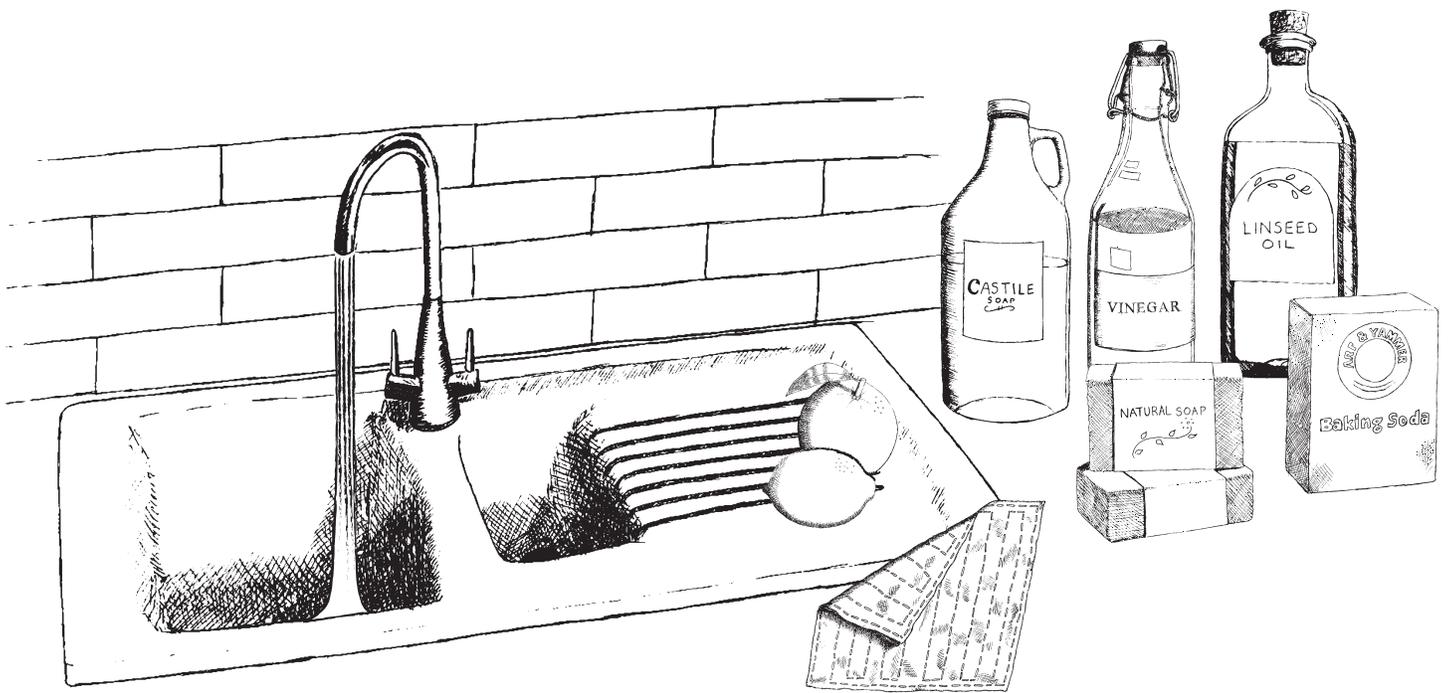


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foreword

by Paul Wheaton (the Duke of Permaculture)

A few years ago I watched a fascinating documentary about a family having their conventional household cleaners removed and replaced with “organic” equivalents. I told the people on the screen to go even further, but they ignored me - as people in documentaries do. There were several profound things that the documentary showed, despite them not following my advice. The entire family became noticeably healthier. But the thing that stuck in my memory the most was something that the documentary didn't mention: the mom, who did most of the cleaning, appeared to gain about 30 IQ points.

The documentary happened in a way that you would expect. As they were taking the conventional products away, the family was quite frustrated: “how can we possibly be clean without these products?” If nothing else, it has taken years of trial and error to develop the brand loyalty.

I suspect that if Raven was the producer of the movie, the reaction would have featured ten times more panic! After all, the people in that house were merely replacing their conventional products with less toxic equivalents. So the box of conventional detergent was replaced with detergent labeled as better for the environment. To those nice people, this was a bit beyond their

comfort zone - a bit too radical. If that household were to be converted to what is outlined in this book, those people may have taken up knives and other stabby things to express their opinion about “that is NOT going to happen in this house!”

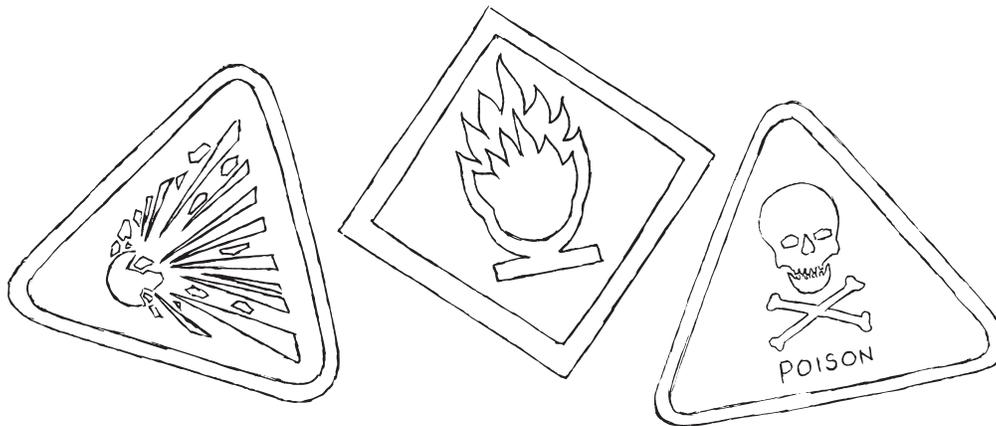
The contents of this book might best be embraced by people that have already made the switch that was forced upon that family. People that have been using the “eco” detergent for a few years may have already had a thought of “what is in this that makes it ‘eco’? If I studied, would I find something even better?”

Raven has a difficult task. She is an advocate for the power and chemistry of water. Her bleach is sunlight and her favorite all purpose cleaner is a handful of bits of knowledge.

There it is - to clean with a bit of knowledge instead of a bottle of toxins with a massive marketing campaign. Maybe a little experience. And top it off with having a cleaner home in half the time and one tenth of the expense. Because there was no marketing. Of course, most people won't believe it if there was no marketing. And that's the biggest challenge of all.

What a delicious book. So simple. So easy. So much cleaner than a house that stinks of cleaners. Fresh air, sunshine and water are the core. A bit of lemon juice, vinegar and baking soda used sparingly... Truly clean.





introduction

As a child, I was fascinated by the pictograms living under the sink. Skulls with the remains of two chicken drumsticks, triangles, stop sign shapes with flames, and even a hand built from small bones. All these meant “do not touch” because they were the thing adults called dangerous. And yet, these were the magic potions used to clean our home. Even at that age, I felt there was something wrong.

A home is supposed to keep us safe. My childhood brain couldn’t understand why we allowed “DANGER! No Touch!” items to penetrate our safe zone. As I grew up, I gradually accepted that it was the way things were supposed to be. School, TV, magazines, and even my Grandmother, confirmed that cleaning the house with poisons was the right thing to do.

Having left my parents home to make a place for myself in the world, I dutifully filled the alcove under the sink with the required magic potions and their pictograms. As I cleaned the house each week, those childhood doubts returned. Why do we clean our home this way? What did people do before? If these poisons are so good at cleaning, why is cleaning so tough? How come I felt so ill after cleaning when cleaning my home was supposed to make me feel healthier?

I made a switch to a simple style of cleaning in the late 1990s, scrounging recipes and cleaning tricks from pre-war household manuals, family lore, and

personal experimentation. As I adopted this new style into my daily life, I noticed something neat: just about everything I was using to clean was edible.

The result is a style of cleaning that is easier, cheaper, and no longer contaminates my home with strong perfumes and poisons.

Cleaning with cleaners I can eat made sense because if I feel good about putting it in my mouth, then it is okay for cleaning my home.

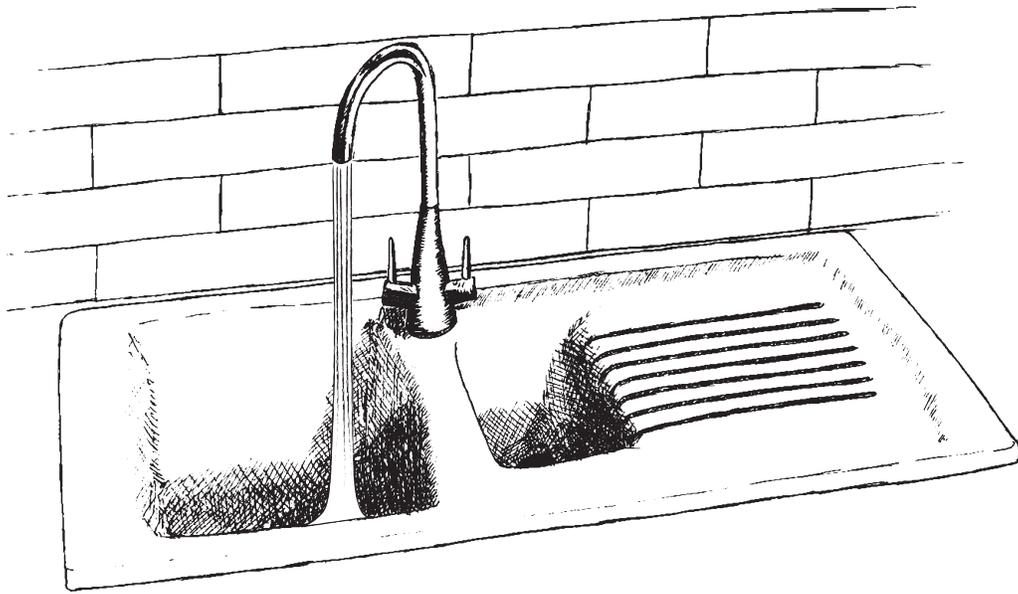
My cleaning philosophy is divided into four principles:

1. The easiest dirt to clean is the dirt that isn't there.
2. The newer the mess is, the easier it is to clean.
3. Start with the least intrusive method first.
4. Mess happens. We need ways to deal with this without resorting to poisons.

This guide is just a starting place. Feel encouraged to adjust the recipes to fit your needs.¹

When trying any cleaning product for the first time, even water, do a test on an inconspicuous place first to see if it damages the item you are cleaning. Although these ingredients are natural, they are still chemically active (that's how they clean), and need to be handled with respect.

¹Most of the time changing the quantities down will give better results than using more cleaning products.



ingredients

chemically active

Chemically active means that the substances are eager to interact with other substances to create a chemical reaction. It's like the vinegar volcano that always won first prize in the science fair even though the solid-liquid project was way cooler (cornstarch mixed with water to make something that is neither solid nor liquid, but both, but neither...I totally should have got that blue ribbon!). That frothy thing that vinegar and baking soda do when they get together is a classic chemical reaction. Two distinctly different substances combine to make a new substance that is significantly different than the ingredients. I'm oversimplifying.

Now might be a good time to mention, that the thing baking soda and vinegar make is salty water. Salt water doesn't have the cleaning power of either baking soda or vinegar; and those suds, they don't do much either.

ingredients list

These are the main ingredients I use for cleaning my home. I've organized this list of ingredients by my preference; the ones at the top I use the most,

the ones at the bottom seldom come out of the cupboard.

water: the least intrusive cleaner and my starting place for any mess. Most of the time I don't need anything else.

cold water: some things are best cleaned with cold water, like the first rinse of a milk jug and protein-based stains like blood.

hot water: the hotter the water, generally, the more cleaning power it has. But try cold water first to avoid setting (making permanent) stains.

boiling water: melts grease and kills germs. It also melts plastic and scalds hands just as easily - use with care. Avoid boiling wool as it shocks the fabric which felts or shrinks it.

sunlight and fresh air: cost nothing and are some of the most powerful cleaning agents available.

salt: abrasive and deodorizing. Something of a miracle when it comes to microbes; discourages harmful microbes and encourages the good guys. Can damage metal and can even pit and corrode stainless steel.

baking soda: a base or alkali. Sodium Bicarbonate is a naturally occurring mineral and makes a useful non-abrasive scouring powder. Cuts through grime and absorbs odours. It's an antacid, fire extinguisher (keep a box near the stove for cooking fires), and deodorizer.

vinegar: an acid. Use white or apple cider vinegar. Cuts through grime and grease, dissolves limescale, and kills germs. There are many types of vinegar; the general rule of thumb is, the more acidic the stronger the cleaning power.

hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂): has a high antibacterial quality and is often marketed as a natural bleaching agent; you can buy this in gallon jugs in the laundry aisle. Decays to O and H₂O (oxygen and water).

lemons and oranges²: the juice is a natural bleaching agent and the peels have oils in them that are excellent for cleaning.

diatomaceous earth (DE): an off white talc-like powder that is the fossilized remains of marine phytoplankton. Abrasive and absorbent, DE is a miracle cure for bugs. Seek out food-grade DE. I don't use this much, but it's worth mentioning because it's a fantastic ingredient to keep on hand for pest control. For more information about these little diatoms, see <https://richsoil.com/de>

borax: is a 'safe' pesticide and should be used sparingly where humans live. Although it is used in food production for texture and preserving, a lot of "natural cleaning" recipes use borax too liberally. This excess is coming

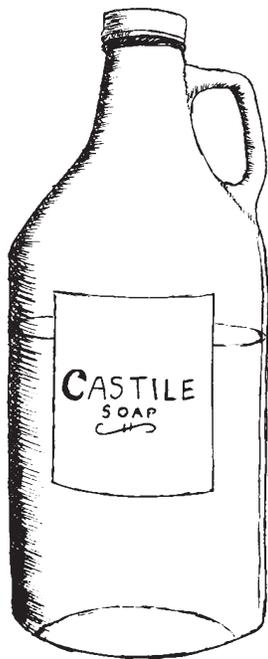
²However, I don't have a lot of personal experience with this due to the frustrating price of lemons and their juice in Canada. I do hear from friends who live in warmer climates, that lemon juice is a powerful participant in cleaning their home.

back to haunt them as some places are now banning borax in cleaning products. It has very strong cleaning powers, anti-fungal, antimicrobial, softens water, makes fabrics fire-resistant, and is extremely good at dealing with ants and preventing moth damage. Since the goal of this book is to reduce the toxins in the home, I feel it's best to restrict borax to where it doesn't come in daily contact with human skin.

natural soaps³: made from animal fat or vegetable oils. This is the soap our ancestors used and is not to be confused with detergent. Real soap is biodegradable and is a mild insecticide. It cuts grease and when dissolved in water, encourages dirt to detach from stuff and float harmlessly away.

Whatever cleaner you choose, remember it is not clean until the cleaner is gone. The more you apply, the more time and water required to wash away the cleaner. Not doing so will leave behind a residue that can damage your stuff; or worse, this residue attracts dirt which makes for more frequent cleaning. When it comes to cleaning agents, less is often more.

soap vs. detergent



Soap and detergent are not identical.

Soap is made by combining fats or oils with lye in a violent chemical reaction that creates the superhero⁴ of household cleanliness. Soap works by decreasing the surface tension of the water and binding to dirt, oil, and bacteria. In other words, when dissolved in water, soap makes the dirty stuff lift off the things we want to clean and bind to the soap molecules in the water. When we rinse away the soapy water, we rinse away grime and grease. Humans have been making and using soap safely for at least five thousand years. We've been using detergent (with various degrees of safety) for almost 100 years.

Detergent is a combination of cleaning substances that are designed to do the same job as soap, but usually with a little extra tossed in. Lotion and foaming agents

³Soap is the only ingredient in my list that is not officially food-safe. I include it because using soap - real soap, not detergent - has a role to play in eliminating messes. Soap in my home is mostly for dishes, laundry, and washing hands. I find that most of the time, it's just as easy, if not easier, to clean household messes without soap than with it. But it is part of my arsenal, so I include it in this list.

⁴Like all superheroes, it's not something we need for everyday crime prevention. We don't send up the Bat Signal for a purse snatching or the neighbour's dog doing its business on your front lawn at 2am.

are very popular. These don't help clean and they often leave a residue that attracts dirt if not rinsed properly. Dyes, scents, antibacterial products, and other substances can make a human ill. Washing one's mouth out with soap is an unpleasant experience, but washing one's mouth out with detergent can quickly lead to a ride in the ambulance.

I tend to avoid detergents whenever possible, instead favouring the more traditional soap.

Castile soap is made with vegetable oils and lye and my favourite variety of this vegan-friendly soap is from Greece and made with organic olive oil dregs. But Greece is a long way for soap to travel and most vegetable oils don't



grow this far north. What's worse, not all vegetable oils are organic or grown in an eco-friendly fashion. The whole point of this book is to avoid biocides ('bio' means life, 'cide' means to kill) in the home, so be aware: if the vegetable oil is grown with herbicides, pesticides, and a whole host of petroleum-powered processes, this soap isn't going to be good for you or the environment.

You can buy Castile soap in bar or liquid form.

Lye soap⁵ - or as my grandmother called it, 'soap' - is made from animal fat combined with, you guessed it, lye. Traditionally, the lye water would be made from steeping wood ash for several days. The animals were raised locally, and the fat was saved for making soap, lotions, and greasing mechanical items. In northern climates, animal fat was much easier to grow than vegetable oils, so it made good economic and ecological sense to use what was to hand. That said, not all animals today are raised in favourable conditions, and fat is an excellent repository for toxins the animal is exposed to in their diet and environment (especially pesticides). Seek out soaps made from happy animals raised organically or better!

I've only ever seen lye soap in bars, but it shaves into powder nicely and dissolves in water quicker than Castile soap.

To make bar soap last longer, unwrap it and let it dry for several days before using. Keep the soap in a dish that allows water to drain and the soap to dry between uses.

Place odds and ends of soap in a jar. When you've collected enough, add water and heat on low (double boiler, or the leftover heat harvested from the oven or next to the fireplace) until it melts. Use this liquid soap for clothes, dishes, or general household cleaning.

⁵Castile soap is made with lye and vegetable oil, but 'lye soap' is made with lye and animal fats. Confusing, isn't it?

An easier option is to keep the ends of soap in a small basket to dry. Grind the soap in a specially designated grater (I like a rotary grater), and use it for making powdered laundry soap or other places you might want powdered soap. Powdered soap is lightweight and easy to take travelling.

Bar soap made from animal fat, especially mutton tallow, is good for cleaning and conditioning leather. what is bleach?



When asked to describe bleach, you would probably tell me about a jug of stinky liquid used to disinfect kitchens and ruin your clothes if carelessly splashed about. This liquid is a combination of water and sodium hypochlorite also known as Chlorine Bleach. The safety of using this chemical around humans is dubious, but for some reason whenever I mention the word 'bleach' to someone, this is all they can think of. People have forgotten that there are thousands of different kinds of bleach.

The action of bleaching is making things whiter and sterile. There are many human-friendly elements that accomplish these tasks. For clarity's sakes, I'll call these 'bleaching agents'.

Here are a few better alternatives to chlorine bleach:

- Sunlight⁶ is probably the most potent bleaching force we will ever need. It's also the most affordable and falls freely from the sky.
- Lemon Juice is another popular bleaching agent. It kills unwanted microbes and makes things lighter in colour.
- Hydrogen peroxide is a reasonably strong bleaching agent. The neat thing about this is damp cloth hung in the sun creates its own H₂O₂ as it dries. Historically, linen cloth was bleached white by dampening each morning and laying on the grass or, better yet, snow on sunny days.
- Borax is useful for whitening laundry as it doesn't yellow cloth like chlorine bleach. It's also useful as an insecticide to prevent moths from chewing on wool cloth in storage. I use borax in the final rinse when washing my woolens for winter storage but generally avoid using borax where it might come in daily contact with human skin.

⁶From the sun not the bottle

unwanted microbes

The human body has more bacteria cells than human cells. When we kill bacteria, we destroy an essential part of ourselves. Having a balance of microbes within our bodies and our environment is vital to staying healthy.

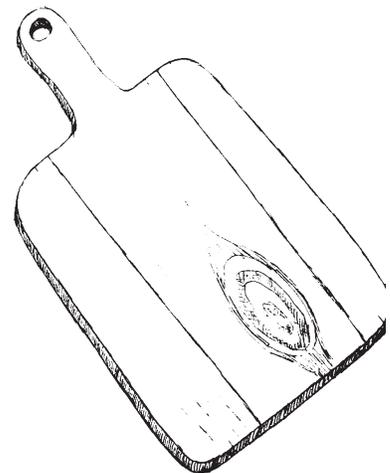
That said, I also live with someone who is immune compromised, so I'm not going to risk excessive or dangerous bacteria hanging out where I prepare food or wash my hands. I don't resort to antibacterials, but I do take steps that make these areas unfriendly to harmful invisible beasties. We have zero tolerance for some microbes, like harmful ones from raw meat or faecal contaminants; but a more lax approach to the less harmful invisible beasties like the kind that make kimchi taste good.

Knowing what germs need to survive, and taking that away from them, prevents germs from making themselves at home. Microbes enjoy moist environments and cling to dirt and grime. Bacteria generally dislikes strong alkali or acid. Fresh air and sunlight are the arch nemesis of germs and some of the most powerful cleaning agents available.

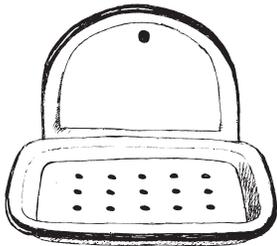
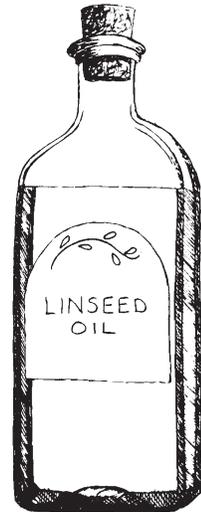
Germ warfare is complicated. I recommend you do your own research on how to keep you and your family safe. I can only tell you what I do; in the end it's your home, your choices.

Here are some tips to reduce harmful microbes in your home:

- Most things in the home benefits from a sunny vacation. Sunlight and fresh air have brilliant purifying qualities. On a sunny day, take your household items like cutting boards, coats, rugs, or anything that needs refreshing outside and leave them in the sun for a few hours. Do this at least twice a year per item; once a month is better.
- Dry your chopping blocks in direct sun and store them standing on edge whenever possible so that fresh air can flow around them.
- Salt kills bacteria by dehydrating them. Use salt on the kitchen food prep surfaces.
- Dry washcloths and towels completely between use and change them frequently. Change the cloth before it starts to smell.



- Because of their quick-drying nature, washcloths made of linen, hemp, or nettle fibres are more resistant to mildew and mould than any other textile - even synthetic ones. Cotton is also good, but it holds onto water longer which gives bacteria a chance to stink.
- Use acid and alkali to create environments that discourage bacteria.
- Maintain your wooden surfaces with edible oil or beeswax polish, especially where food is prepared. Beeswax mixed with linseed oil is my favourite. Walnut oil is another good one, but be careful as some people with food allergies respond badly to this oil. Oiling strengthens wood, enhances its natural antimicrobial qualities, and fills in the cracks which harbour grime and unwanted bacteria.
- If using bar soap, put it on a proper soap dish so it can drain and dry between use. If the soap sits in a swampy mess, it will disintegrate into a goeey soup, attracting unwanted invisible beasties.



Mould and mildew not only look disgusting but can also make humans ill. Some moulds are deadly! Mould and mildew love dark, damp places with stale air. The key to preventing this devious duet is to not give them what they want. Open up the blinds and let the sunlight in every morning. On warm days, open the windows to allow the fresh air to flow through and keep things dry. Identify and exterminate undesired sources of moisture like condensation on windows or leaky pipes.

tools

There are lots of tools we can use for cleaning, many of them already in the pantry.

Cleaning rags are easily made from old T-shirts or other cotton knit fabric cut or torn into squares. Likewise, old towels can be cut into squares or rectangles, then sewn with a zig-zag stitch (or two, parallel rows of straight stitch) about 1/4 inch from the edge to reduce fraying.

how to make a scrub mitt

items you'll need:

old towel

paper and pencil

pins

needle and thread or sewing machine and thread

Place your hand on the paper and trace around it in the shape of a mitt. Now draw a line that is half an inch outside the first line. This will be your seam allowance, and the first line will be approximately where your stitching will happen. Don't worry too much about perfection, it's just a cleaning mitt,

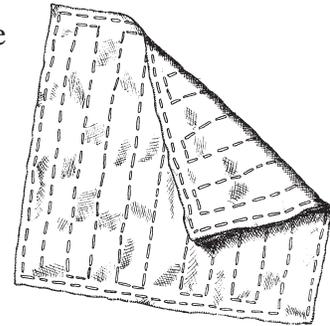
not a bridesmaid dress. Cut the pattern along the outer line.

Pin the pattern to the towel and cut the cloth to the shape. Now do it again so that you have two pieces of towel shaped like a mitt. Place these two pieces together and sew approximately one-half inch in from the edges, leaving an opening for your hand.

zokin

Zokin (Japanese cleaning cloths) are my absolute favourite cleaning cloth. These are made with two or more layers of fabric basted (stitched) together with a decorative stitch. These are perfect for dusting and polishing wood floors. Give them a good rinse and allow to dry completely between uses.

For information on how to make your own zokin:
<https://permies.com/t/zokin>



make your own mop

At the end of its life, a stubby push broom can be wrapped in rags and tied with cotton twine to make a very handy mop for hardwood floors.

steam

Something I always wanted to try is a small steam cleaning machine. Using just water, it loosens grease, grime, and dirt, making them easy to wipe away. Hotter than boiling water, steam is a brilliant disinfectant. Steam is also used for removing some stains, wrinkles, and dust mites from hard to clean fabrics.

surfaces

This chapter contains recipes for general everyday cleaning of surfaces such as counters, tables, walls, tubs, sinks, doors.

I keep these recipes for emergencies, but the secret is, I very seldom use them. I needed to at the start of my conversion away from commercial cleaners, but once the stickiness from commercial cleaners wore off and I polished away the micro scratches from scouring powder, I found that very little dirt sticks to surfaces. Most of the time a damp cloth will do the trick. For stronger cleaning, I may resort to a hot damp cloth.

Any time we use something more aggressive than water, we risk attracting dirt and making cleaning more difficult next time. Unless well rinsed, soaps and detergents leave a residue. Scrubbing agents abrade surfaces, making it easier for dirt to cling. Cleaners deceive. At first, they feel fast, but over time they increase the frequency and effort needed to clean. Do I sound like a broken record yet? That's because record skips are caused by scratches on a record due to improper cleaning and care.

When possible, choose cleaners that are easy to rinse and scrubbers that polish, not scratch, the surface.

recipes

Remember to try water first. These recipes may be natural, but so is cyanide. Natural does not equal benign. If these substances were inert, then they wouldn't clean. Always treat these ingredients with respect and use only enough to get the job done. The more cleaner you use, the more you have to rinse away.

One more thing before we begin: if the cleaning starts to stink more than the mess, then open a window and leave the room immediately. You're using too much!

all-purpose cleaner

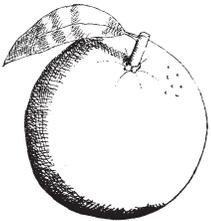
1 rag
warm water
Dampen a rag with water and wipe away the dirt.

vinegar cleaner

1 part vinegar
10 parts warm water
Mix and use right away. Also suitable for tile floors.



orange polish



half an orange peel turned inside out
Rub with the inside of the peel to clean, polish, and remove germs. Good for sinks and bathtubs that aren't all that grimy. Not something I use in the summer because it attracts fruit flies. This also works on some faucets. Buff with a soft dry cloth to polish.

disinfect

A wooden butcher's block scrubbed with salt after using reduces bacteria. I've heard from several sources, including my local butcher, that meat cut on a salt-cleaned block will last longer than that cut on a bleached-cleaned block.

scouring

hot damp cloth

baking soda

Make the water as hot as you can stand without burning yourself. Moisten the cloth and ring it out, dip the cloth in baking soda and scrub. Rinse well. This is great for bathtubs and difficult sinks.



extreme scouring powder

Note: this may scratch the surface - if you're going to risk it, then a pumice stone might get better results for less effort.

1 part baking soda

1 part diatomaceous earth

Mix together and apply with a damp sponge.

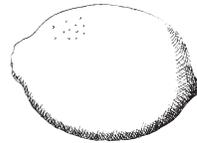
lemon cleaner

4 tablespoons baking soda

4 cups (1 litre) hot water

a few drops of lemon juice

Mix together and use immediately. This is pretty good for cutting that kitchen grease that forms on surfaces if you do a lot of frying. Alternatively, one can keep the range hood fan on high to capture the grease particles in the air.



Tracy's lemon cleaner

To add to the cleaning power of vinegar, and make it smell nicer, fill a big container with lemon peels, then add vinegar and let it sit for about a week. You can use it full strength for greasy areas, or dilute with water for general cleaning. Freeze the juice from the lemons in ice cube trays, put the cubes in a bag in the freezer, and use in cooking, cleaning, or to put in water to add a hint of lemon.

Here are a few recipes for emergency cleaning situations. The soap is optional in all of these. Including it makes these recipes no longer food-safe.

soft scrub

2 parts baking soda

1 part boiling water

liquid Castile soap or a pinch of grated soap

Whisk water and baking soda together until dissolved. Whisk in a couple of drops of liquid Castile soap. Store in an airtight jar. If mixture thickens, add some water and shake.

degreaser

2 parts baking soda

1 part liquid Castile soap

Mix to create a paste and apply with a damp cloth. Allow to sit for 15 minutes then remove and wash with soapy water. Rinse well.

all-purpose liquid cleaner

1 gallon very hot water

1 teaspoon baking soda (optional)

5-10 drops of liquid Castile soap or two pinches of grated soap

Mix soap and water until soap is completely dissolved. Add baking soda and mix well. For the best effect, use while warm.

a different all-purpose liquid cleaner

1 gallon very hot water

1 teaspoon vinegar

5-10 drops of liquid Castile soap or two pinches of grated soap

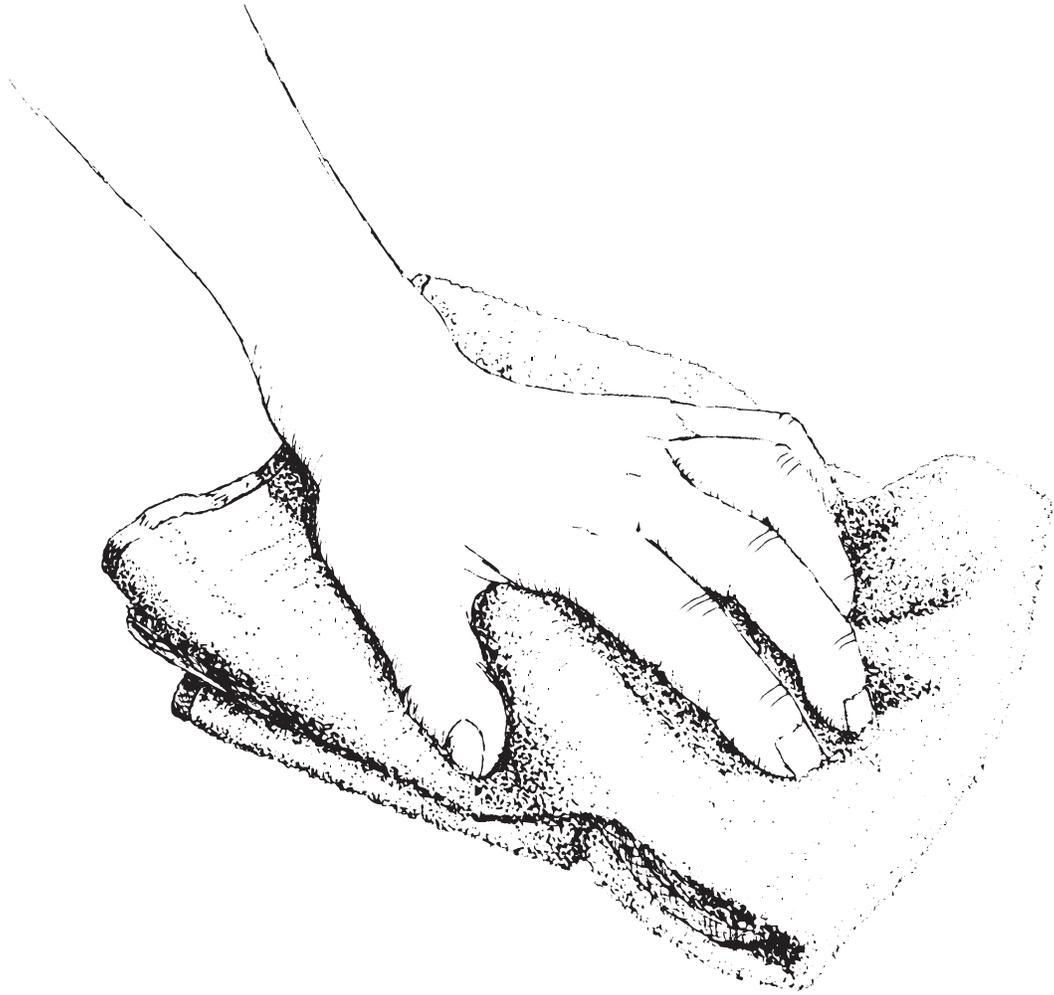
Mix soap and water until soap is completely dissolved. Add vinegar and mix well. For the best effect, use while warm.

spray cleaner

5 drops biodegradable dish soap or detergent

white vinegar

Combine soap with vinegar in a spray bottle, use within one month. (Not one I use very often as it needs a spray bottle, and too much vinegar in the summer attracts flies.)



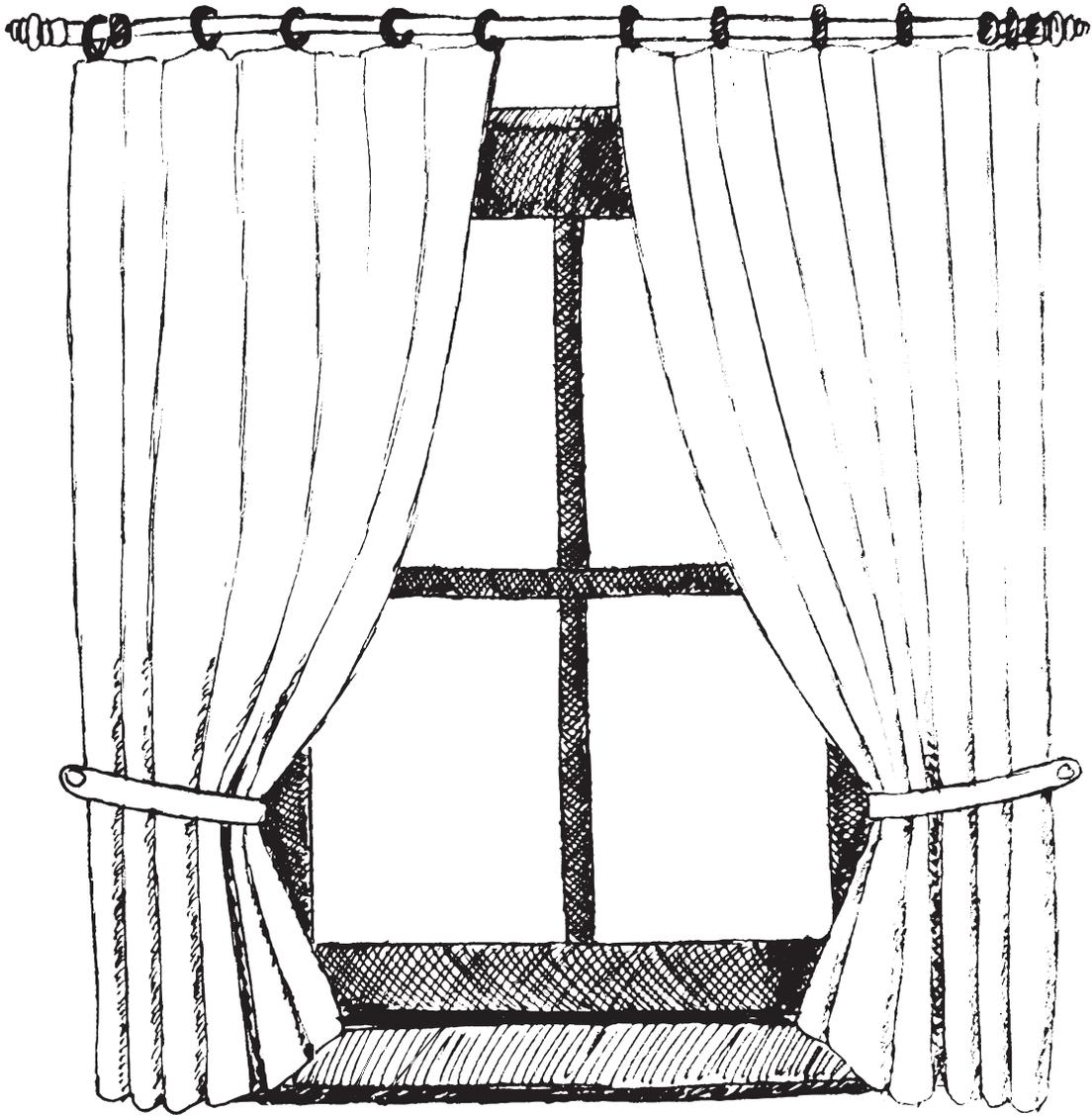
dusting

The goal of dusting is to remove the dust from the house, not just the surfaces. Unless you really like dusting, avoid methods that send the offending particles up into the air only to re-settle on a different surface later that afternoon. A feather duster is excellent for dislodging dust so it can return to adorn your bric-a-brac. It becomes a make-work project where new dust joins old dust and one cleans the same dust over and over again.

I dust with a soft, slightly damp cloth cut from old T-shirts. For a big dusting job, I'll fill a bucket with extra-hot water and put one or two drops of olive, lemon, or flaxseed oil per gallon of water. With a few rags in the water, I take the bucket over to where I'm dusting. Remove one cloth, wring extremely well, wipe the surface and fold the dust into the cloth. When the cloth is sufficiently dusty, place it in the water and use the next cloth.

Another trick for dusting wooden surfaces I've noticed is to use the cloth I've used to wax the furniture. It has a coating of beeswax and linseed oil, and it's brilliant at collecting dust. Note, dispose of oily rags safely as they burst into flames at awkward moments.

Leave time between dusting and sweeping the floor so that any escaped dust can settle.



glass

A bit of damp newspaper used to be all we needed to clean glass. The Times (and The Sun, and just about every other newspaper) have changed since the mid 20th Century, and the recipe for the paper and ink used to print newspapers changed with them. The paper is more abrasive now, which causes scratches on the glass making it cloudy over time. The ink doesn't have as much arsenic (a good thing) and other chemicals that made it cut through grime.

In this day and age, it's best to avoid using paper towels or any paper to clean windows. Little bits of chewed up tree fibres and other muck go into making paper. Some recycled paper, I'm told, includes a high amount of clay content⁷. Tree fibres are not soft, and over time they leave tiny, nearly invisible scratches that make the glass look cloudy. When possible use a cotton or linen cloth to clean windows.

One of the biggest problems with windows is mildew and moisture. Windows get colder than the rest of the wall and this attracts condensation. At night we cover windows with drapes, blinds, tinfoil, or whatever, to insulate against the cold. This same barrier designed to keep us comfortable traps the moisture against the window. If a windowsill is damp, it will grow mould and mildew which damages the window frame and rots the window coverings.

⁷Perhaps this is why some papers self extinguish when used to light the woodstove.

Opening the blinds, drapes, whatever, each morning is essential to avoiding moisture build up.

Open the blinds as soon as the sun comes up in the morning. Let the cleaning power of sunlight in and encourage the moisture to evaporate from the window. Having different layers of window coverings makes for a healthier and well insulated home. Linen is the best for the outer layer (closest to the window) because it does not degrade in sunlight and is resistant to mildew and mould. It's also extremely easy to clean in a modern washing machine⁸. Wool is an amazing insulating layer for the inside curtain but not as easy to clean. Give wool curtains a soak in hot water for an hour, twice a year, and dry outside in the sun to kill any dust mites and other bugs. If moths are a problem in your home, add a teaspoon of borax to the soaking water.

Most windows clean well with just water and a cloth. Here are a couple of recipes for those times when we need something stronger.

glass cleaner

3 tablespoons vinegar
4 cups (1 litre) warm water
Mix in a spray bottle and use while still warm.

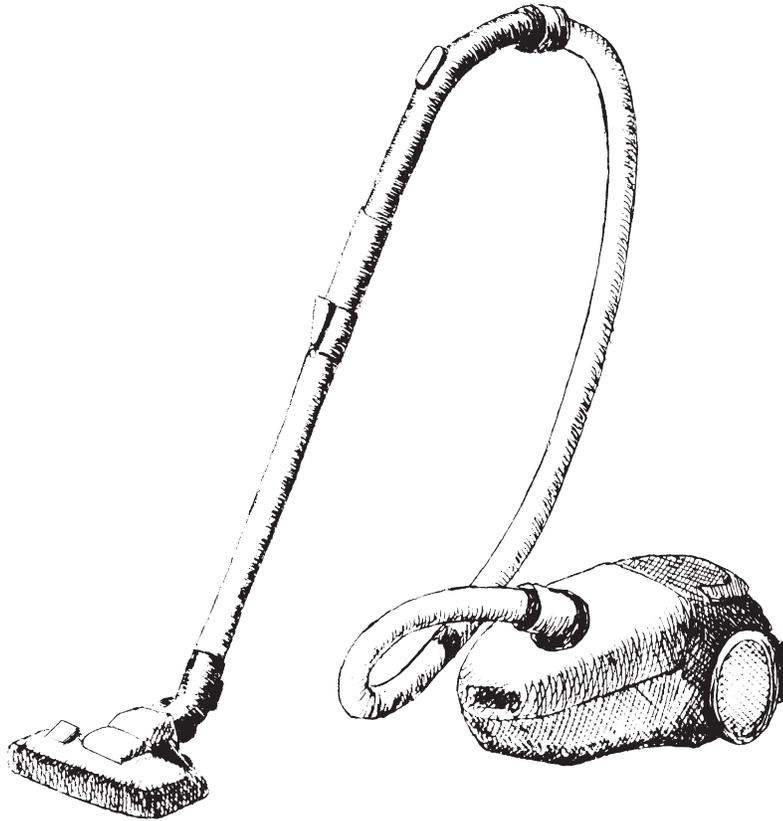
glass cleaner for 10-year grimy windows

2 part water
1 part white vinegar
Mix together and pour in a spray bottle.

In the summer, I generally avoid cleaning the windows as it lets more light and more heat into the house. If I do clean the windows, I use less vinegar in the summer to reduce the number of flies it attracts.

⁸Whatever you do, don't put linen in the dryer as it will overdry the cloth, making the fabric brittle and fragile.

floors



Let's face it, shoes get dirty. It's almost like they are designed to act as a barrier between your feet and the ground - they get dirty so you don't have to. Doffing your shoes at the entrance is a huge step toward keeping your house clean. A mat outside your door to wipe your feet and an area rug, small enough to lift and shake outside frequently, helps trap all sorts of dust, dirt, mud, grime, and detritus that would otherwise be making themselves at home in your house.

Hard floors are easier to clean than carpet. Wall to wall carpet not only traps dust but it creates it too. Tiny particles of plastic make their way into the air as the carpet breaks down. I suspect that breathing plastic probably isn't one of your favourite pastimes. Dust mites that can aggravate allergies and other breathing problems find it harder to survive on a hard floor than on carpet.

Choose area rugs made from natural materials, or even better, from natural recycled or repurposed material. From time to time, take the rugs outside on a sunny day to get some sun and a beating. Hang the rugs on a railing and beat with a stick or broom handle to get the deep dust out. Sunlight kills bacteria and dust mites, and sends fleas, moths and other bugs scurrying away.

Vacuums suck: but the problem is, they often don't. Buy the best quality vacuum you can afford and treat it right. For most of my life, I had a hate-

hate relationship with vacuums. I've spent many hours of my life trying to find the blockage in a vacuum, and many more hours wondering how come an hour after I vacuumed there's a fine layer of dust over everything? They are supposed to get rid of dust, right?

Eventually, after a very teary afternoon with a come-a-long vacuum, a massive dust rabbit, an even larger hammer, and many words of an obscene nature, I went out and spent some serious money on a new vacuum. We chose one with a HEPA filter, an easy to empty, see-through canister (instead of continually needing to guess if the bag was full yet and spending yet more money on new bags), and one that could be disassembled and reassembled like a puzzle (only faster and with simple to follow instructions). Since that day . . . oh, I can hardly even say this it's so corny. I never imagined a new appliance could make such a difference in my life. Instead of the monthly battle ending in not-very-clean-floors, I now vacuum at least once a week and my floors are cleaner than when I started. It wasn't cheap, but it was money well spent. There, I said it. Now, can I stop acting like a housewife from a 1950s magazine?

A clean vacuum is more efficient than a dirty one, which means it sucks up more dirt for less work. Clean your vacuum's filter at least once every three months according to the manufacturer instructions. Dry the filters in direct sunlight to kill off any bacteria or dust mites before reassembling your vacuum. While we're at it, it's a good time to clean or change your filters on your heating system if you use forced air. Dirty filters mean less heat and more dust.

To make vacuuming easier, never put the machine away with a full canister. It makes people like me say nasty words, and someone else has to go and make a cup of tea as a way of apology.

Sweep up large detritus like straw, hay, small branches, and huge chunks of mud before vacuuming as these are ready-made for clogging the machine. If you take your shoes off as you enter the house (and insist your guests do the same), then chances are the larger muck is confined to the front hall or mudroom which makes cleaning the floor so much easier than the alternative.

Swish and flick, as we remember from wizard school, is the trick to levitation. Great for battling trolls, but not so great for sweeping dust as it just sends the dust back into the air. Sweeping is another way to move dust around, mostly into the air so it can resettle on your surfaces later that afternoon. Avoid the swish and flick method of sweeping. Keep your broom at a consistent angle

as you gather the dirt.

An old trick to stop dust from becoming airborne is to sprinkle damp tea leaves down before you sweep. It helps if you drink loose leaf tea. The tea leaves trap the dust as you gather them up.

Always sweep or vacuum before mopping hard floors to remove dirt that scratches the floor. Better yet, instead of mopping, most floors are easily cleaned with a hot, damp (not wet) rag like a zokin⁹ or one of those dry mops on a swivel head.

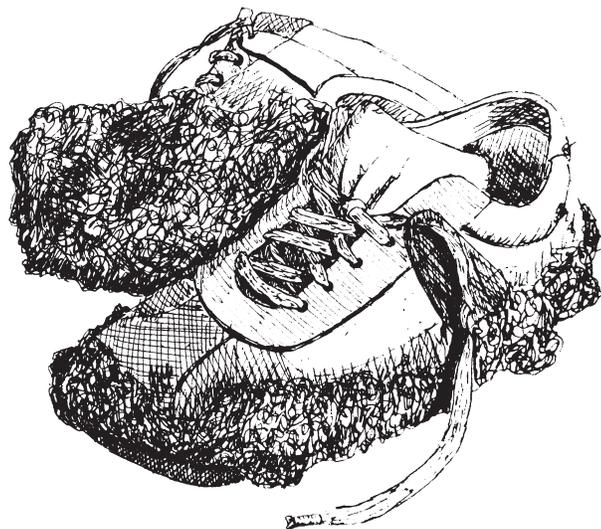
The two main ingredients I use to clean the floor are water and hot water. Most hard floors have a finish on them that is sensitive to acids and alkali. Seeking out pH neutral cleaners is a hassle, but that's okay because it's so easy to clean most messes with a damp rag.

If I do use soap, then I:

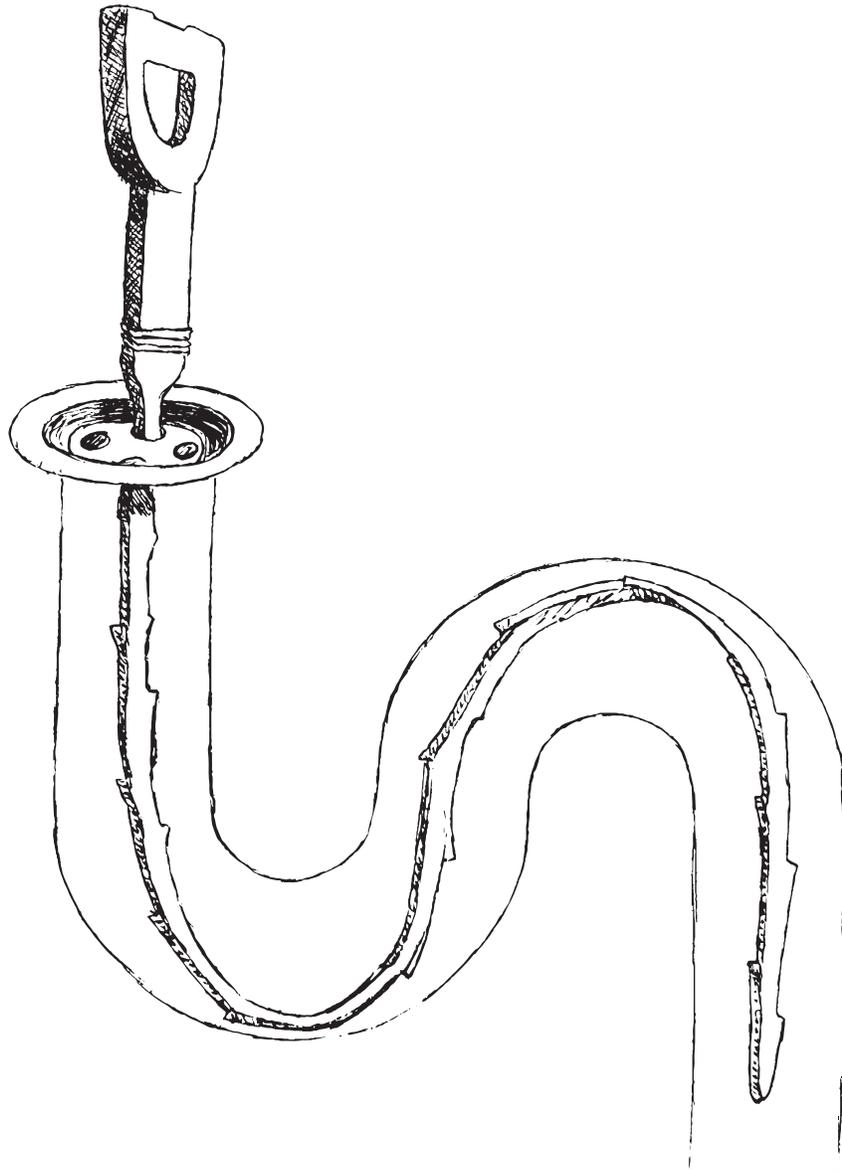
1. make certain it's completely dissolved in water before applying, and
2. rinse thoroughly so it doesn't leave a residue that will attract dirt later.

The tile floor in the kitchen gets messier than the rest of the house. To clean the kitchen floor, I sweep the floor then mix up a bucket of nearly boiling water, five drops of liquid Castile soap or a pinch of grated soap, and a teaspoon of borax. Dissolve everything before adding the mop. I use the borax here because it's an insecticide and I don't like ants and other bugs in my kitchen. I give the floor a good scrub with this mix every spring and again in the late summer. The rest of the time, I mop up spills with a damp rag.

Keep the mops clean and dry them between uses to prevent smells. Mops take ages to dry, so the less wet you get them, the quicker they dry.



⁹<https://permies.com/t/zokin>



plumbing

Now comes the tricky part: drains and toilets. Such wonderful luxuries that I never want to live without, and yet, I wonder, how can something so wonderful cause so much fuss? No one likes cleaning a stinky toilet and clogged drains! What a way to ruin an otherwise lovely Sunday afternoon. And yet, with a tiny measure of mindfulness, plumbing quickly becomes fuss-free.

drains

In the drains, our microscopic allies eat detritus that cause drain clogs. They are especially helpful if you have a septic system as these invisible beasties reduce the frequency you need to pump your tank. Many of the chemicals we use to clean the drain kill off the beneficial bacteria that make our sewer system work.

The easiest drain to unclog is the one that isn't. To prevent the drain from clogging, don't put stuff down the drain that clogs it.

Solid objects are very good at clogging drains: bits of food, hair, that sort of stuff. You know how the kitchen sink usually has that little basket for a plug

— leaving the basket in the plug while it's draining captures a whole swack of solid stuff. Sure, it takes longer to drain, but look at all that stuff that didn't go down the plug hole! Don't forget to get baskets for other drains in your house. It's surprising how much detritus these little baskets capture.

Grease and fat are also serial drain cloggers. Our city recommends we keep an old wide-mouth pickle jar under the sink and pour cooking fats and oils into the jar. When the dripping jar is full, they suggest placing it in the trash or compost - but check with your local municipality as to the correct way to dispose of this oil. My great grandmother used to clean the grease and oils in the fat jar and transformed it into soap, and her mother used to use them for making lamps.

Soap scum is another problem as somehow Castile soap reacts with our water to form a scum on the inside of the pipes. We tried a lot of different methods to prevent this and eventually switching from olive oil to a fat based soap solved the problem. I would love to hear your ideas for getting rid of soap scum from drains at permies.com/t/99068

Strong chemicals (including vinegar and baking soda) kill the bacteria in your drain that help eat detritus. Never use anything that isn't septic safe in your drains, even (or maybe especially) if you are on city plumbing.

some recipes for unclogging drains

a quick solution for mildly clogged drains

A tablespoon of baking soda¹⁰ poured down the drain followed by a kettle full of hot water. Some people use this in the kitchen sink once a week to reduce grease build up. I've had moderate results with this and worry that it disturbs the pH balance in the septic system. I suspect the hot water was the more active ingredient and we can get the same result by draining boiling pasta water down the drain.

the most common, and most useless recipe for clearing drains

The recipe recommended by our municipality for clearing clogged drains involves several tablespoons of baking soda poured down the drain, followed by a white vinegar chaser. Leave to froth for ten minutes, then pour several

¹⁰Half a teaspoon of sifted wood ash might also do the trick, but be careful not to use too much as this could damage the plumbing later on, especially if you have metal pipes.

kettles worth of boiling water down the drain.

The problem is, this doesn't make sense. My high school chemistry class was something of a joke, where we spent hours writing notes back and forth to each other about the pink elephants on the ceiling - perhaps brought on by the leak in one of the Bunsen burners that eventually caused an explosion. But I do remember one lucid moment, perhaps brought on by the open window, where the teacher showed us what happens when you combine an acid with an alkali. The acid and base (alkali) froth up (volcano effect) in a chemical reaction. When the froth subsides, we are left with something that is neither acid nor alkali. It's called salt water; although the kind of saltwater depends on the original chemicals and other complex factors, and oh look, an elephant. Someone must have shut that window.

Knowing that an acid, like vinegar, combines with an alkali, like baking soda, to create a chemical reaction that ends in mildly salty water makes me wonder why so many guides on natural cleaning insist we combine the two, as if we get a super-powered cleaning substance that gives us the benefits of the original ingredients. It doesn't.

So what is it about this baking soda and vinegar drain cleaner that might help clear blocked or sluggish drains? Neither acid nor base has a chance to interact with the grease in the drain as they, like Romeo and Juliet, are far too obsessed with each other. Perhaps it is the force of the reaction between the two, the volcanic froth, that is dislodging solid particles that are clogging the drain? I don't know. However, when I did use this method in the past, within a day or two, the drain was just as sluggish.

the absolute best solution for unclogging drains

The absolute best solution for unclogging drains (after not clogging them in the first place) is to do it physically. There's a little zip-tool for shallow clogs; it's about a foot or so long and you stick it down the drain and pull up the clog. For longer clogs, I use a snake. It's a plumber's tool available in any hardware shop. Be sure to dry the snake before coiling it up again so that it doesn't start to stink.

the toilet

Scrubbing the toilet is so much easier with frequent flushing. However, some times of the year we are on water rations and we have to flush by the rhyme:

*If it's yellow, let it mellow.
If it's brown, flush it down.*

It saves water, but it makes cleaning much more difficult. You may have to adjust your cleaning regime to accommodate how frequently you flush. When possible, flush last thing at night so that nightsoil doesn't sit in the bowl.

One of the simplest ways to clean the toilet is with a scrub brush and frequent scrubbing. Every couple of days, scrub the bowl lightly and flush, reducing build-up and keeping the bowl clean for months between deep cleaning.

The easiest way I've found to deep clean the bowl is to give the bowl a light scrub, flush, then add a cup of vinegar to the bowl to sit overnight (at least 8 hours). Scrub again, and any remaining stains come right off. Failing that, I may sprinkle a bit of baking soda onto a damp toilet brush then scrub. I don't know if it does any good as the vinegar and baking soda neutralise each other fairly quickly, but I feel like the baking soda is providing a little bit of grit to make the scrub brush work better. I'm all for the placebo effect if it does the job.

Always rinse the bowl and scrub brush well. Let the scrub brush drain and air dry to prevent smells.

oddbits

Here are a few random bits that didn't fit anywhere else.

to remove adhesive residue

Rub butter onto the sticky mess. Let sit half an hour, scrape off. Wash with soapy water and rinse well with clean water. I've had moderate results with this. Sometimes it works like a charm, sometimes not so much.

to reduce unwanted smells from around the house

Charcoal in a shallow dish absorbs household odours. I pick out the bits of charcoal from the woodstove and place them in pretty dishes so they look decorative. I change these about three or four times a year, adding the spent charcoal to the compost pile or garden. The plants love it.

You can also refresh charcoal by boiling it for about an hour, remove from the still boiling water and leave to dry.

to clean the oven

My favourite way to clean the oven is to boil the kettle and make a cuppa tea. While the tea is steeping, I put a small amount of boiling water from the kettle on the floor of the oven¹¹, close the door and leave the steam to loosen the dirt inside the oven. Wipe with an old cloth. Repeat once or twice more to remove all the crud.

oven cleaner

2 parts baking soda

1 part water

Stir together baking soda and water. Apply to oven, let sit for 20 minutes, wipe clean.

oven cleaner

1 part baking soda

1 part fine sea salt

Mix together and add enough water to make a paste.

NOTE: Salt can scratch and corrode metal, so make certain it's dissolved in the paste before applying to your oven. Rinse very well to ensure you get the salt off.

¹¹This may not be safe in all ovens - water plus electricity don't always go well together.

resources

Green Enough : Eat Better, Live Cleaner, Be Happier (All Without Driving Your Family Crazy) by Segedie, Leah

The Hands-On Home: A Seasonal Guide to Cooking, Preserving & Natural Homekeeping by Erica Strauss

Naturally Clean : The Seventh Generation Guide to Safe & Healthy, Nontoxic Cleaning by Jeffrey Hollender and Geoff Davis

Organic housekeeping: In Which the Nontoxic Avenger Shows You How to Improve Your Health and That of Your Family While You Save Time, Money, and Perhaps, Your Sanity by Sandbeck, Ellen

about the author

Raven Ranson spins yarn, weaves cloth, collaborates with sheep, wrangles llamas, hugs alpacas, weeds flax, and conspires with cotton on the family farm off the left coast of Canada. You can find her at crowinghen.ca