

# The HEALTHIEST HOME on the Block



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Premium editor: Krissa Y. Strauss

Project manager: Melissa Leo

Copy editors: Kelly Lutterschmidt, Jennifer Hoffner

Cover designer: Lauren Vitello

Photo editor: Stephanie Smith

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# Around the House

## CLEAN SURFACES

Many household cleansers—even some “green” ones—can impact your health. If you are trying to rush the job, you run the risk of misusing the cleaner, causing issues from skin irritation to dangerous respiratory reactions.

Fortunately, with the following products, you can correct the most common mistakes and limit your exposure to toxins, leaving your home with a healthy sparkle.

### TRY THESE PRODUCTS

- **Aussan Natural All-Purpose Cleaner** ([aussannatural.com](http://aussannatural.com))
- **Green Shield Organic Biodegradable Surface Wipes, Fresh Mint Scent** ([greenshieldorganic.com](http://greenshieldorganic.com))
- **Aussan Natural All-Purpose Cleaner** ([aussannatural.com](http://aussannatural.com))

### DIY FIX

- **Mix vinegar with water.** Combine 1 part white vinegar to 9 parts water in a spray bottle.

### DIY RECIPE

#### HEAVY-DUTY MULTI-SURFACE CLEANSER

For a recipe with a little more oomph, try this natural cleaning concoction. (Always spot-test before trying it on a new surface.)

- 2 teaspoons borax
- 1 teaspoon washing soda (not baking soda)
- Hot water
- 4 tablespoons vinegar
- ½ teaspoon natural liquid soap
- ¼ teaspoon tea tree oil
- 8 drops rosemary oil
- 8 drops tangerine oil
- 8 drops lavender oil

1. Dissolve the borax and washing soda (you can find them in your store’s laundry aisle) into 2 cups of very hot water, strain the mixture through a very fine sieve, and funnel it into a 1-quart spray bottle (or forget the sieve and just pour it in slowly, leaving behind any undissolved powder).
2. Add the rest of the ingredients and shake to blend. Top off with more hot water and shake again.

## DUST OFF TABLETOPS

Because household dust can be loaded with harmful substances like flame retardants, allergens, pesticides, and plastics chemicals, it’s important to keep your home as clean as possible. However, many dust cleaners contain air contaminants and hormone-disrupting chemicals. Keep it safe by mixing up your own and using it to dust furniture and other surfaces where dust collects in your home.

### DIY RECIPE

#### LEMON OIL DUSTER

Used with a clean, flannel cotton cloth, this easy recipe is a good solution for dusty surfaces.

- 10 drops pure lemon oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 3 drops olive oil

Combine all ingredients in a clean spray bottle.

## MAKE A CLEAN SWEEP

Independent testing has found that the best vacuums have filters that screen both the dust being sucked in and the air being blown out, says researcher Luke Knibbs, PhD. These filters should also be HEPA-certified, which means they capture 99.97% of all particles as small as 0.3 microns in diameter.

### TRY THESE PRODUCTS

- **Dyson DC65 Animal Complete** ([dyson.com](http://dyson.com))
- **Electrolux Precision Brushroll Clean Bagless Upright Vacuum** ([electrolux.com](http://electrolux.com))
- **Hoover WindTunnel Self-Propelled Bagless Upright** ([hoover.com](http://hoover.com))

## MAKE WINDOWS SQUEAKY CLEAN

Many store-bought formulations will aggravate allergies or asthma.

### TRY THIS PRODUCT

- **Whole Foods Market Glass Cleaner, Unscented** ([wholefoodsmarket.com](http://wholefoodsmarket.com))

## Smart Dog

Don’t expect a hypoallergenic pet to sneeze-proof your pad. In a Henry Ford Health System study, allergen levels in homes with “hypoallergenic” dogs were found to be no lower than in homes with other breeds. The reason: The particles sloughed off the dog’s tongue and saliva—not its fur—are what trigger an allergic reaction.

However, a dog can be an allergic person’s best choice because cat dander is “stickier” and thus tougher to eliminate. Shampoo your pooch regularly, and blow-dry its fur on low heat to fight “wet dog” smell, which is caused by mold. Finally, when washing your clothing, use bleach or a color-safe alternative to destroy any dander clinging to fabric.

## Don't Clean for Cat-Allergic Company

Well-meaning cat owners vacuum right before allergic guests arrive. Regardless of the vacuum used, vacuuming will actually lift the allergen most responsible for cat allergies into the air for several hours. Your guests will suffer more than if you hadn't vacuumed at all.

### DIY RECIPE

#### AMMONIA-FREE WINDOW CLEANER

Whip up a batch of natural window cleaner. A bottleful will only run you about 40 cents.

¼ cup vinegar

½ teaspoon natural liquid soap  
(such as Ecover dishwashing liquid or Dr. Bronner's)

2 cups water

1. Put all of the ingredients in a spray bottle and shake to blend.
2. To use the cleaner, spray it onto the glass, covering as much as you can finish wiping in a few minutes. Scrub as needed with the rough side of a kitchen sponge, and squeegee off. Use a cotton cleaning cloth to dry off the blade of the squeegee between swipes and wipe up any liquid that puddles at the bottom edges of the windowpanes. Toss the cleaning cloths into the wash basket, and enjoy your sparkling windows.

### REPAINT FUME-FREE

Even when paint cans are resealed, the paint can release significant levels of harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Unopened cans are more airtight but still emit fumes, so store them in a well-ventilated area, such as outdoors in a shed, until ready to use. Surprisingly, your walls are a leading source of these harmful compounds because paint continues to “off-gas” up to a year after it dries, say some experts. Not sure how safe your paint is? Use your nose as a guide: The stronger the smell of the paint, the more VOCs it contains.

The good news is, you can buy paints that don't contain harmful ingredients.

#### TRY THIS PRODUCT

- **Benjamin Moore's Natura Zero-VOC and Zero Emission Paint** ([benjaminmoore.com](http://benjaminmoore.com))

## In the Yard

### GO GREEN WITH FERTILIZER

Many conventional fertilizers are full of heavy metals, which can cause cancer and birth defects, says an analysis by the California Public Interest Research Group. Plus, they're often prepackaged with a weed-killing pesticide—usually 2,4-D, a chemical cousin of Agent Orange. Given the risks, the added cost for organic fertilizer is worth it. Plus, “you don't have to apply it as often, and eventually might not have to at all, because it enriches the soil, which chemical fertilizers don't,” says Paul Tukey, author of *The Organic Lawn Care Manual* and founder of SafeLawns.org. “Look for a fertilizer derived from plants like alfalfa or seaweed or from bone- or fish meal.” The following three brands are recommended by Tukey.

#### TRY THESE PRODUCTS

- **Fire Belly Organic Lawn Care** ([firebellylawncares.com](http://firebellylawncares.com))
- **Bradfield Organics** ([bradfieldind.com](http://bradfieldind.com))

- **Dr. Earth** ([drearth.net](http://drearth.net))

- **Corn gluten meal:** Spread it on for both fertilization and weed control (at Home Depot and Sears).

#### DIY FIXES

- **Compost:** If you don't have the space to make your own, you can purchase it, but you don't need organic. “Regular compost is more than adequate to promote healthy lawns,” says Kathy Sargent-O'Neill, a landscape designer and board member of the Ecological Landscaping Association. She differentiates “regular” from the costlier, pesticide-free compost best used for growing organic food crops. “It still feeds the good microscopic critters and keeps grass healthy and green,” says Tukey.

Just avoid any compost made of “biosolids,” which can be a nice way of saying “sewage” and may contain chemicals, he adds.

## Bug Out Safely

You can make your yard free of lawn chemicals by growing a low-maintenance groundcover and wildflowers. If you do need a pesticide, Neem Oil (available at garden stores), which can be diluted and sprayed, is an organic product that's even safe on edibles.