



Ask Heloise

Green Enough Housekeeping

Safe and Green

Q: What can I put on my kitchen counters to get rid of ants that's also safe around children?

Jean Harmon, Richmond, VA

If ants are visible on counters, simply wipe them up with a damp paper towel and dispose of it in a garbage can outside. Then clean the area with soap and water to remove the scent trail the ants are following. If the problem persists, try this solution: Mix 1 part boric acid powder with 20 parts sugar. Sprinkle in areas where you see lots of ants, such as the backs of cabinets and under the sink. Do not use on food-prep surfaces, and keep kids and pets away (put up temporary barriers). When ants are no longer visible, sweep up bait and dispose.

Q: I work at a preschool. Can you suggest a nontoxic disinfectant to clean surfaces and toys?

Doris Jordan, Falmouth, ME

Make a very diluted solution of household chlorine bleach—2 teaspoons bleach to 1 quart water—and pour into an opaque plastic spray bottle (bleach degrades when exposed to light). Spritz over dirty areas; let sit for five minutes, then wipe with a damp cloth. Even watered-down bleach can stain, so take care not to spill on clothes or carpets.



Do you have a favorite "green" cleaning hint? E-mail your answer to HELOISE@goodhousekeeping.com.

I grew up in a green household: My mother (the original Heloise) cleaned with vinegar, baking soda, and lemon juice because it was practical—many green staples are much cheaper than other household products and perform just as effectively. Plus, they don't give off nasty fumes, harm your septic system, or add a lot of extra packaging to landfills. Here are my favorites.

SALT

For scrubbing gunk off wooden cutting boards, glass baking dishes, and pet bowls
Sprinkle a liberal amount on a damp sponge and wipe.

BAKING SODA

For banishing stinky odors
Sprinkle a few tablespoons in the bottom of an empty gym bag and leave overnight; pour a liberal amount into a kitchen trash can before putting in a new bag.

CORNSTARCH

For absorbing oil and grease spills on clothing, upholstery, and leather
Pat on enough to cover stains (try to get to them before they set); let it sit awhile, then remove with a toothbrush or vacuum.

ISOPROPYL ALCOHOL

For erasing fingerprints from chrome and stainless steel; cleaning cell phones (not screens)
Wipe surface with an alcohol-dampened microfiber cloth or paper towel.

LEMON JUICE

For fading stains on unfinished wood, such as a butcher block
Apply with a cotton swab, then let air-dry.

3 PERCENT HYDROGEN PEROXIDE

For killing mildew on bath tiles; sanitizing plastic cutting boards
Sponge over area; let dry, then rinse well. Mop up spills quickly (hydrogen peroxide can cause fading).

CREAM OF TARTAR

For removing rust from white porcelain fixtures
Mix 2 tablespoons cream of tartar with a few drops of 3 percent hydrogen peroxide to make a paste; apply to stain and let sit. After paste dries, rinse off.

