

Cleaning with Simple Products

Including lemon juice, castile soap, vinegar, toothpaste and salt

Lemon Juice

The acid in lemon juice removes dirt and rust stains. It's especially effective when mixed with salt, which makes an excellent scouring paste. **Price:** About 50 cents a lemon.

Use Them to Clean Your...

Countertops: Dip the cut side of a lemon half in baking soda to tackle countertops; wipe with a wet sponge and dry. Don't use on delicate stone, like marble, or stainless steel (it may discolor).

Cutting boards: To remove tough food stains from light wood and plastic cutting boards, slice a lemon in half, squeeze onto the soiled surface, rub, and let sit for 20 minutes before rinsing.

Dishes: To increase the grease-cutting power of your dishwashing detergent, add a teaspoon of lemon juice.

Faucets: Combat lime scale by rubbing lemon juice onto the taps and letting it sit overnight. Wipe with a damp cloth.

Garbage disposal: Cut a lemon in half, then run both pieces through the disposal.

Grout: Spilled morning coffee on your tile countertop or backsplash? Here's how to tackle grout stains: Add lemon juice to 1 or 2 teaspoons cream of tartar (an acidic salt that acts as a natural bleaching agent) to make a paste. Apply with a toothbrush, then rinse.

Hands: When you touch raw fish, the smell can linger on your fingers. Rub your hands with lemon juice, which will neutralize the odor.

Laundry: To brighten whites, add 1/2 cup lemon juice to the rinse cycle for a normal-size load.

Plastic food-storage containers: To bleach stains from tomato soup and other acidic foods on dishwasher-safe items, rub lemon juice on the spots, let dry in a sunny place, then wash as usual.

Essential Oils

Extracted from plants, some essential oils can kill bacteria and mold. They're very strong, so don't go overboard: One drop of peppermint oil is as potent as 30 cups of peppermint tea. Can be purchased at Trader Joe's or health food stores

Use Them to Clean Your...

Combs and brushes: Fill a container with 1½ cups water, ½ cup distilled white vinegar, and 20 drops tea-tree, lavender, or eucalyptus oil. Soak combs and brushes for 20 minutes. Rinse and air-dry.

Scuffed floors: Apply two to four drops of tea-tree oil to the spots. Wipe excess oil with a cloth and rub in distilled white vinegar.

Gum-encrusted items: Orange oil is great at removing this sticky offender from various materials. (Don't worry: It shouldn't stain fabrics. But do launder immediately.) Apply with a cotton ball.

Shower doors: Wipe scum-covered glass doors with a few drops of lemon oil twice a month. It will protect them from grime buildup.

Toilets: Add 2 teaspoons tea-tree oil and 2 cups water to a spray bottle. Shake, then spritz along the toilet's inside rim. Let sit for 30 minutes; scrub. You can also place a few drops of your favorite oil on the inside of the toilet-paper tube.

Windows: Mix 2 ounces water and 10 drops lavender or lemongrass oil to wipe grime off windows. Bonus: These oils may repel flies.

Liquid Castile Soap

Like other soaps, this plant-based version efficiently loosens grime and dirt from surfaces, but it's gentler, so it won't dull them." Price: About \$8 for 8 ounces at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Car: Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup liquid Castile soap with hot water in a bucket (fill almost to the top). Rub a generous amount of the solution on your car's exterior, windshield, hubcaps, and tires with a large sponge, then thoroughly hose it off.

Floors: You can mop almost any type of floor with a solution of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup liquid Castile soap and 2 gallons warm water. If the floors are greasy, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup distilled white vinegar to the bucket. leather upholstery: Add 2 drops liquid Castile soap to 1 quart warm water. Apply to the leather with a barely moist sponge.

Marble countertops: Stir 1 tablespoon liquid Castile soap into 1 quart warm water. Dampen a cloth with the solution and wipe surface. Rinse, then dry with a clean cloth.

Sinks, showers, tubs, and ceramic tile: Create a homemade soft scrubber by combining 1 tablespoon liquid Castile soap and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup baking soda.

Stovetop and vent hood: Add a few squirts of liquid Castile soap to 2 cups hot water. Apply to the stovetop, the burners, and the vent hood to cut through accumulated grease.

Cooking Oils

Vegetable- and plant-based oils, such as olive and sunflower, dislodge dirt, diminish scratches and imperfections, and “hydrate wood that has aged or dried out from exposure to the sun,” says Hunter. Price: About \$7 a pint at supermarkets.

Use Them to Clean Your...

Cast-iron pans: Make a scrubbing paste with vegetable oil and a teaspoon of coarse salt to combat cooked-on debris, then rinse with hot water.

Hands: To get paint off your skin, rub with vegetable oil, then wash thoroughly with soap.

Leather shoes: Wipe away dirt with a damp sponge, then apply a drop of vegetable oil to a soft cloth and rub the surface to remove scuff marks. Buff the shoes with a chamois to a shine.

Rattan and wicker furniture: To prevent rattan and wicker from drying or cracking, lightly brush them with vegetable or sunflower oil and gently rub in with a cloth. Warm the oil on the stove first to thin it and make it easier to apply.

Stainless-steel surfaces: For extra sparkle, pour olive oil onto a cloth and buff.

Wood furniture: Make your own polish by mixing 2 cups olive or vegetable oil with the juice of 1 lemon; work it in with a soft cloth. To smooth out scratches in light-colored wood, rub them with a solution of equal parts olive or vegetable oil and lemon juice.

Borax

When added to a laundry wash, borax makes detergents even more effective. It's also quite alkaline, so it kills mold and fungus and softens water. Price: About \$5 for 4 pounds at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Baseboards, countertops, and walls: Dissolve ½ cup borax in 1 gallon hot water and pour the solution into a spray bottle (which you can store for later use). Spritz generously, wipe down with a damp cloth, and let air-dry.

China (including hand painted): Soak china in a dishpan filled with warm water and ½ cup borax; rinse well.

Dishwasher: If the machine is smelling like last night's chicken cacciatore, sprinkle borax in the bottom, let it sit overnight, then wipe down with a damp sponge. No need to rinse; just run the next load.

Pots and pans: Rub borax into cookware with a damp sponge; rinse well.

Toilet: Pour borax in the bowl and let it sit overnight. Swish the bowl a few times with a toilet brush and flush the next day. Gets rid of rust stains.

Vinegar

This acidic wonder can wipe out tarnish, soap scum, mineral deposits, and more. Among natural cleaners, it's the clear champ. Distilled white vinegar creates an environment that inhibits the growth of mold, mildew, and some bacteria, such as E. coli and salmonella, Price: About \$1.80 for a quart at supermarkets.

Use It to Clean Your...

Coffeemaker: Pour equal parts vinegar and water into the machine's water chamber, then switch on the brew cycle. Halfway through, turn off the coffeemaker and let the solution sit for about an hour. Turn it on again to complete the cycle, then run several cycles with clean water.

Dishwasher: To disinfect the interior of the machine, pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vinegar into the reservoir and run an empty cycle. Or place a small bowl filled with vinegar on the bottom rack and run an empty cycle.

Drains: Clean drains—and the pipes they're attached to—by pouring vinegar down them. After 30 minutes, flush with cold water.

Floors: Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar to a bucket of warm water to clean almost any type of floor except marble (vinegar can scratch it) or wood (vinegar can strip it).

Glassware: For spotless hand-washed glasses, add 1 cup vinegar to the rinse water.

Moldy walls: Spray vinegar on the affected areas. After about 15 minutes, rinse and let dry thoroughly.

Showerheads: To combat mineral deposits, pour vinegar into a plastic grocery bag and knot the handles over the neck of the showerhead, securing with rubber bands. Let soak overnight. Rinse with water in the morning.

Steam iron: To get rid of mineral deposits, fill the iron with equal parts vinegar and water; press the steam button. Turn off, let cool, empty, and rinse.

Windows: Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar, 2 cups water, and a squirt of liquid Castile soap in a spray bottle. Spritz windows and wipe with a sheet of newspaper.

Baking and Washing Soda

Baking soda (a.k.a. sodium bicarbonate) and its close cousin, washing soda (sodium carbonate), both absorb odors. But unlike baking soda, slightly stronger washing soda can't be ingested; wear rubber gloves when handling it. **Price:** About \$1.08 for a pound of baking soda; \$7 for 4 pounds of washing soda; both available at supermarkets.

Use Them to Clean Your...

Can opener: Dip a toothbrush in a paste of 2 tablespoons baking soda and 1 teaspoon water and use it to dislodge gunk.

Garage floors (and other concrete surfaces): Pour washing soda generously on oil and grease spots and sprinkle with water until a paste forms. Let stand overnight. The next day, scrub with a damp brush, hose down, and wipe clean.

Garden tools: Dip a moist stiff-bristled brush in washing soda to scrub trimmers, clippers, and more. Rinse, then place in a sunny area to dry. (Don't use washing soda on aluminum tools.)

Grills and barbecue utensils: To combat tough grease stains, dip a moist stiff-bristled brush in washing soda and scrub away.

Stove burner grates: In a dishpan, soak them in 1 gallon warm water and ½ cup washing soda for 30 minutes. Rinse and dry.

Stained teacups and coffee mugs: Fill with 1 part baking soda and 2 parts water and soak overnight; rub with a sponge and rinse.

Upholstered furniture: To remove odors, sprinkle baking soda on the fabric, then vacuum.

Scuffed walls: Erase crayon marks by applying a baking-soda paste (equal parts baking soda and water) to white painted walls (baking soda may dull colored walls). Let dry before brushing it off with a clean cloth.

Toothpaste

The combination of a mild abrasive, a surfactant (detergent), and an antibacterial agent makes toothpaste a potent stain-fighter. Stick with standard paste, not gel, and steer clear of formulas designed for tartar control and whitening. These often contain chemicals and additional abrasives that can damage items such as fine silver. Price: About \$3.65 for a tube.

Use It to Clean Your...

Acrylic accessories (such as desktop organizers): Squeeze toothpaste onto a toothbrush and work it into scratches until they diminish. Wipe residue off with a cloth.

Chrome fixtures: To polish faucets and taps in the kitchen or bathroom, smear a dime-size amount of toothpaste onto them, then buff with a soft cloth until they shine.

Scuffed linoleum: Reduce marks by scrubbing them with toothpaste and a dry cloth until no toothpaste residue remains.

Piano keys: Rub each key carefully with a damp cotton swab and a dollop of toothpaste. Wipe dry and buff with a clean cloth.

Tarnished silverware: Put a dab of toothpaste on a soft cloth, rub it onto the tarnish, then rinse with water and dry with a clean cloth.

Steam iron: Mineral deposits can stain an iron's soleplate. Apply a dab of toothpaste and work it into the plate. Use a clean cloth to remove residue.

Table Salt

Salt's granular texture makes it perfectly suited for scouring. Table salt, sea salt, and kosher salt can all be used, but table salt is the cheapest choice.

Price: About 69 cents a pound.

Use It to Clean Your...

Artificial flowers: Place the fake blooms inside a paper bag and pour in salt. Close the bag and shake vigorously. The salt will dislodge accumulated dust and dirt.

Glassware: Salt won't scratch the way a scouring pad can. To get out stubborn stains, add some salt for extra abrasion and scrub.

Greasy pots and pans: Sprinkle salt on cookware to absorb excess grease. Dump out the salt before washing as usual. (Not recommended for nonstick cookware.)

Spills in the oven: If that casserole bubbles over as you take it out of the oven, pour salt on the spill to soak it up. When the oven is cool, wipe with a damp sponge.

Stained teacups and coffee mugs: Sprinkle salt on the outside of a lemon peel; rub the affected area till clean.

Wooden counters and tables: Cover grease splatters with salt to absorb as much as possible. Wait an hour, then brush away the salt.