

Environmental Tip of the Month: cleaning products. December 2021



Our oceans and rivers are being polluted by the waste and toxic substances that are going into them. We have our own local problems with sewage being discharged into rivers.

Many household cleaners contain dangerous ingredients and a large part of these will also go down our drains into the sewer system and then into treatment plants. Ultimately they will go into our rivers and oceans causing enormous harm to aquatic and marine life.

If we can change our way of using cleaning products then as a community we could have a positive impact on our environment.

There are many “green” cleaning products which you can buy, but here are some cheap and simple alternatives to 5 (there are many more) common but toxic ingredients found in many household products.

1. **Bleach.** *Chlorine* bleach is used to whiten, disinfect, and deodorise. Bleach that ends up in the soil or waterways raises pH levels significantly, killing plant and animal life. A natural alternative is 3% hydrogen peroxide which when mixed with vinegar or used on its own can be used for cleaning glass, floors (dilute with hot water), baths, toilet bowls and showers.
2. **Glass Cleaner.** Most of these contain *butyl cellosolve* which is hazardous. A natural alternative is vinegar which is simply acetic acid. You could add a few drops of an essential oil to make it smell nice but it makes a great general cleaning product. The only surfaces it should not be used on are stone, ceramics, pearls, computers and phones!
3. **Surface cleaners.** Many surface cleaners contain the chemical *galaxolide*, which is highly toxic to aquatic life. A natural alternative is 125 ml distilled vinegar mixed with 500ml distilled water and 20 drops of essential oil. Use this in a spray bottle.
4. **Toilet bowl cleaners** are amongst the most toxic home cleaning products. They often contain *phosphoric acid* and *sulphates*, which are highly corrosive. Because these products go down the drain they are highly contaminating for soil, animals, plants and groundwater. When washed into our waterways they contribute to the toxic algal blooms that we can see. The natural alternative is to sprinkle baking soda into the toilet bowl, add vinegar. Leave for 30 minutes then brush away the stains.
5. **Drain cleaner.** Many drain cleaners contain *sodium hydroxide* which is highly corrosive and damaging to both drains and to anything it comes into contact with downstream. A reusable metal drain snake is the simple way to unclog drains or if the blockage is further down the drain try 4oz baking soda followed by 125ml vinegar.

If we can make even small changes to the way we use cleaning products as a society, we can have a significant positive impact on our environment.

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