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Make your home healthy with green cleaning

When Kermit the frog said, "It's not easy being green," he probably wasn't talking about being an environmentally conscious consumer. However, there are people who think that being green by making and using cleaning methods and products with environmentally friendly ingredients is just too much trouble. The truth is, green cleaning may be easier than you think.

The ingredients in DIY green cleaning recipes are very inexpensive, and may be sitting right in your cupboard. Basic ingredients include salt, baking soda, cornstarch, vinegar, lemons and olive oil, as well as Borax (sodium borate), hydrogen peroxide, washing soda, and vegetable oil-based liquid soap. These and others can be purchased at your local groceries, health, or big box stores. Purchasing ingredients on-line will save you even more money. Plus, you use only a small amount of each ingredient in most recipes.

Reusable spray bottles work well with many green cleaning recipes, so fewer containers end up in the landfill or need recycling. Microfiber mops and cloths are great reusable cleaning tools for easy cleanup.

In most cases, green cleaners work just as well, if not better, than their commercial counterparts. You may have to add a little elbow grease, but it's worth it to limit your exposure to toxic chemicals. Besides, elbow grease is needed when using many commercial products.

On average, people spend 90 percent of their time indoors, a lot of which is spent at home. The Environmental Protection Agency reports levels of common organic pollutants to be 2 to 5 times higher inside homes than outside, many of which come from the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released from household cleaning products.

Commercial cleaners can cause eye, skin or respiratory irritations. Some products can trigger asthma attacks in people with sensitivities. Some ingredients are known as, or are likely human carcinogens or reproductive toxicants.

Most household cleaning jobs only need soap or detergent and water. Disinfectants are usually unnecessary, and may be overkill. There are multiple health issues associated with common bleach and other disinfectants. Young children are at higher risk from breathing toxic vapors from such products as their lungs are still developing.

Simplify cleaning and reduce VOCs by using fewer cleaning products and making green cleaners that can be used for several purposes. Here's a recipe for an all-purpose cleaner.

3 tablespoons white vinegar

½ teaspoon washing soda

½ teaspoon vegetable oil based liquid soap (castile)

2 cups hot water

Mix together in spray bottle or bucket. Apply and wipe clean.

While green cleaners are considered much safer, no cleaning product is 100 percent safe and should be used with caution. Whether you make them yourself or use commercial cleaners, you should follow routine protective measures. Always label containers with ingredients and date made, and store out of reach of children and away from pets.

For more information about green cleaning products and programs, contact your local UT – TSU Extension office at 723-5141.