



# Back to the future

*A shopping list of safer alternatives  
to household hazardous products*

## Three good reasons to consider alternatives

- 1** The closest contact you have with hazardous chemicals is usually in your home. You'd be surprised how many everyday products in your laundry cupboard or shed are made from materials and substances that could potentially harm your health if not handled, used or stored according to the directions provided on the label.
- 2** If they can harm you, they can harm others including our flora and fauna. Remember: every chemical product you use at home ultimately ends up in the environment.
- 3** You can save money by buying these safer, simple alternatives.

**It's a marketing myth that you need smartly packaged, expensive chemicals to do all your household chores effectively. Instead of being the boon for mankind they're purported to be, many actually have the potential to harm your health as well as the environment.**

**Remember: Buying chemicals in bulk doesn't save you money if you throw half away. Consider the safer alternatives to household chemicals.**

## Your basic shopping list

The best thing to do to reduce your household's hazardous waste is simply to stop using dangerous products and replace them with the following safer alternatives.

But this is just a start. There are many more alternative products and ways to use them. We'd encourage you to search your local library or on the Internet for more.

To find out how to use these products to solve specific household problems, visit our web site for our other fact sheets: [www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au](http://www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au)

### **Bicarb soda (sodium bicarbonate, baking soda)**

Bicarb soda occurs abundantly in nature. The only downside is it needs sophisticated processing to

reach high standards of quality and purity. However, this non-poisonous powder is inexpensive and has a multitude of uses within the home. It removes stains, helps take away unpleasant smells, softens water, polishes, relieves itching and acts as a toothpaste and deodorant.

### **Borax**

Borax is a naturally occurring mineral salt. This fine, white powder acts as a stain remover, natural deodorant, fabric and water softener, and soap booster. It can also bleach, disinfect and control insect pests.

*Warning: borax is poisonous when swallowed and can enter the body through broken skin (like a cut), so take care how you use and store it.*

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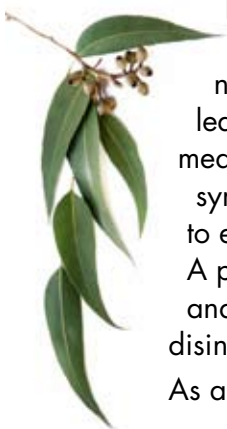
### Cloves

Cloves are the dried flower buds of tropical myrtles. You'll know them best from use in the kitchen as a spice. Cloves are non-poisonous, sweet smelling, readily available and inexpensive. Moths find them totally repellent.

### 'Elbow grease'

OK, it's not a real substance. But 'elbow grease' is an old expression for putting in a bit of effort (it's a play on getting the elbows moving, as in 'rubbing'). It's amusing to think how much some people pay for gym memberships, personal trainers, exercise bikes and flashy runners and then buy dangerous chemicals to spray on and wipe off without any physical exertion. This is just our little way of saying you might have to put in a little more effort with some of these natural ingredients. But think how much better you'll feel when you stop using hazardous substances (and you've built up your biceps to boot).

### Eucalyptus oil



Providing the quintessential smell of the Australian bush, this natural oil is distilled from gum leaves (eucalypts). It has many proven medicinal properties, from relieving the symptoms of colds and influenza to easing aches and pains. A penetrating oil, it evaporates rapidly and you can use it as an antiseptic, disinfectant and deodorant. As a cleaning agent, it can: freshen

a load of washing; remove grease, gum, some glues and stubborn stains from clothes; lift tar and adhesive material from paintwork and the dog's paws. It's also an important part of most wool washes and it can repel insects. Ever had trouble with indelible markers? Use some eucalyptus oil on a tissue and simply wipe them off.

*Warning: although natural in origin, eucalyptus oil contains ingredients that are highly toxic if swallowed. So keep it out of the reach of children.*

### Fly swats

Keep one in the kitchen and one in the laundry and you can get rid of all those pest strips, aerosol sprays and insect bombs. There's even a spring-loaded 'fly gun' you can get that is not only highly effective but perverse fun too.



### Lemons

There's nothing more useful than a lemon tree in your garden. The acidity in lemon juice has many uses beyond flavouring. You can use it as a mild bleach, a deodorant and a cleaning agent. Lemon juice will also soften stains and repel insects.

### Olive oil

Pressed from the fruit of the olive tree, we normally just use this beautiful oil for cooking. But it has many other uses as well. Not only does it make the perfect polish for wood and leather surfaces, its smoothing, protective qualities also make it an excellent beauty aid.





### Salt

Sodium chloride (salt) is a completely natural substance that's non-toxic. In ancient times, it was once deemed so valuable it was used as currency. Today, we're all 'rich' enough to

have salt in our pantries. But if you're only sprinkling it on your dinner, you're missing some of its greatest value. Salt can be used as an antiseptic to clean cuts and grazes (simply dissolve two teaspoons of cooking salt in one cup of boiled water and wait for it to cool down before using). This solution also makes a great mouthwash and treats gum disease. You can dissolve salt in boiled water for an eye bath.

Salt is invaluable for scouring and disinfecting food preparation areas and utensils. To clean and disinfect a drain, simply pour in a handful of salt followed by a jug of boiling water. Salt even helps prevent colours running in the wash and removes stains.

### Soap shaker

OK, so they may be hard to get hold of these days. (You could try eBay, garage sales or opportunity shops.) But what a splendid device it is. With nothing but the power of your wrist, you can use a metal soap shaker loaded with all your leftover slivers of soap – instead of throwing them out – for a cheap, safe alternative to dishwashing detergents. Definitely worth tracking down.

### Steel wool

Together, good, old steel wool and bit of 'elbow grease' provide a simple, inexpensive and highly effective means of removing stubborn dirt on cooking utensils and around the home without using powerful – and potentially harmful – chemicals.



### Vinegar, white

Made by fermenting apples, grapes or malt, vinegar provides a mild acid that neutralises grease and soap residues. So instead of just sprinkling it on the fish and chips, try white vinegar as a four-in-one general purpose cleaner. You'll find it's an excellent anti-mould agent, mild disinfectant, bleach and deodorant.

### Washing soda (sodium carbonate)

Available as either crystals or a crystalline powder, washing soda is useful as a water softener, stain remover, degreaser, silver tarnish remover and drain cleaner. You can also use it as a poultice to reduce swelling and in your bath to relieve aches and pains.

*Warning: do not use on silk, wool, vinyl or aluminium.*

#### References:

1. Dadd, D L (1997). Home Safe Home. Jeremy P.Tarcher/Putnam. New York, USA.
2. Stewart, R (2002). Robin Stewart's Chemical Free Home. Black Inc. Melbourne, Victoria.
3. Total Environment Centre (1996). A-Z of Chemicals in the Home. National Library of Australia.

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