

## Green Up Your Spring Cleaning

By Amy Allen Clark

*Amy is a stay-at-home mother of two and the founder of MomAdvice.com.*

The arrival of spring is a great time for deep cleaning at home. Why not add some green to your cleaning routine too? In my home, we've traded store-bought cleansers for homemade versions that are free of harsh chemicals, yet strong enough to tackle the mess. These save my family money, are safe to use around children and won't aggravate my asthma.

Greening up your cleaning routine is simple and cost-effective when you break it into small steps. Start by using cleaning cloths instead of paper towels. Using cloth napkins for a few meals per week and cloth rags for cleaning can reduce the need for commercial paper products. In time, you may stop buying them entirely.

The next time you're running low on a commercial cleaning product, try replacing it with a homemade version, then – as your comfort level grows – add more natural solutions to your cleaning arsenal. Here are my favorite green cleaning ideas.

### Green Cleaners

Be sure each cleaner is clearly labeled. Store out of reach of children.

#### All-purpose cleaner

Mix two tablespoons of mild dishwashing soap and two cups of water in a spray bottle. Give it a shake and use anywhere you'd typically use a commercial all-purpose spray – like countertops, bathroom surfaces, highchairs and plastic outdoor furniture.

#### Glass cleaner

Mix one part white vinegar with one part water in a spray bottle. Use on mirrors and windows.

#### Scouring scrub

Mix one cup Borax, one cup baking soda and a quarter cup of salt. Use one tablespoon as a scrubbing agent in toilets, tubs and sinks. I use it to make bathroom surfaces gleaming white.

#### Newspaper

Reuse as mirror and window wipes. It's a good lint-free alternative to cloth or paper towels.

#### Old toothbrush

An old toothbrush sanitized in boiling water cleans small crevices. I keep one in my cleaning caddy.



*quick tip*

Creating a family center in high traffic areas (like the near front door) helps you stay organized. Include a family calendar, organizational baskets and hooks for keys. When your family comes in the door, they can put their stuff in the right places, stopping messes before they start! This is also a great place to keep a recycle bin for junk mail, and a shredder for credit card offers and other sensitive items.

## ★ HELP ★ ★ FROM THE ★ ★ KIDS ★

Get kids excited about cleaning with a ticket incentive system:

**DESIGN** a set of raffle tickets with your kids using construction paper and stickers. [Click here](#) for downloadable template. Older kids might enjoy designing the tickets on your home computer.

**ASSIGN** a ticket value to various chores. For example, making the bed may be worth one ticket, while helping mom with kitchen cleanup after a meal might be worth three.

**CREATE** a prize list. An extra story at bedtime may be worth five tickets, a trip to the movies may be worth 15 tickets or a new video game may be worth 35 tickets. Base prizes on your children's age and interests, and be sure to offer rewards that aren't money-driven, like a Saturday board game tournament that maximizes time with mom or dad.

### The cloth system

Replace paper towels with microfiber cleaning cloths, or rags recycled from old towels and clothes. Rid cleaning cloths of bacteria by using the sanitize cycle on your washer. The Steam Sanitize cycle on some Kenmore Elite® HE washers eliminates 99 percent of certain bacteria.

If you use several cleaning cloths, try a color-coded system. I use pink cloths as baby wipes and yellow cloths for general housecleaning.

### Natural fabric softener

Replace liquid fabric softener with white vinegar. A quarter cup in your washer dispenser is a natural way to soften fabrics, and it won't give off a vinegary smell.

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## Small Steps To Help Green Your Home

- Clean or change your HVAC filters. A dirty filter makes your system work harder and use more energy. Read Kenmore expert [Tom DeSalvo's article on appliance maintenance](#).
- It's a good idea to have your HVAC unit serviced annually for efficient operation. This isn't something I want to tackle myself, so let the pros at [Sears Home Services](#) take care of it for me.
- Clean your dryer's vented air duct for efficient operation.
- Check the temperature on your water heater. To save money and energy, set it between 115 and 120 degrees.
- Turn your thermostat down at night and when you're not home. Even a one-degree decrease can make a difference on your energy bill and for the environment.
- Make sure windows and doors are properly sealed. If not, fill in edges with caulk to prevent air from seeping in or out.
- Recycle what you're tossing out. This means putting glass, plastics and paper in the recycle bins, as well as giving away or gifting clothing, furniture and other items that someone may find useful.

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## Kitchen Cleanup 101

### Stovetop

Soak removable pieces like grates and knobs in a sink full of warm water and dish soap. If they're dishwasher safe, go ahead and run them through the dishwasher. I typically clean the stove on Saturday nights and use the oven or slow cooker for meals.

### Oven

If your oven has a self-clean option, use it. Once the oven has cooled, run a damp rag over the interior to clean out the ashes. Self-cleaning your oven during the winter can help warm your house, but during warmer seasons, be sure to do so on cooler days.

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*quick tips*

Sterilize and extend the life of your dish sponge by soaking it in fresh water (no soap) until it is very wet and microwave it for two minutes. Microwave it for two minutes. Be careful! The sponge will be hot, so let it cool before handling. Do not microwave scouring pads or sponges with heavy-duty scrub materials.



## Deep Clean Your Home

Don't like the odors and smoke of the self-cleaning option? The exclusive [Kenmore AirGuard™ feature](#) virtually eliminates them. And you can turn the AirGuard off when you're baking cookies so that the pleasant aroma fills your home!

### Refrigerator

Fill a dish tub with warm water, a spoonful of baking soda and a splash of lemon juice. Soak removable surfaces and drawers in the tub, or wipe down surfaces using a cloth soaked in the cleaning mixture. Transport and store condiment bottles on cookie sheets while you wipe down surfaces.

Want to keep your refrigerator cleaner between cleanings? Select Kenmore models come standard with [Microban® Antimicrobial Protection-infused crisper bins](#). Microban technology provides continuous protection from odor and stain-causing bacteria.

### Dishwasher

To quickly freshen your dishwasher, pour a stick or pouch of sugar-free citrus drink mix into the detergent compartment when your dishwasher is empty and then run the rinse cycle. You can also make a mild paste out of baking soda and water to remove food spots from the dishwasher door and walls.

Save time and money without pre-rinsing or scrubbing thanks to Kenmore dishwashers with [TurboZone™](#) rotating spray jets. To serve up clean dishes, load dishes facing the water source and separate silverware so spoons and forks don't bunch up.

### Microwave

Fill a bowl with water and add one tablespoon of lemon juice; then cook in the microwave for two minutes. Let the bowl sit and steam for five more minutes. The steam loosens caked-on gunk while the lemon juice freshens the microwave. Now, cleaning the interior with a damp cloth is a breeze.

### Toys

Here's how I keep my kids' playtime clean and healthy:

- Periodically wipe toys and play surfaces with a microfiber cloth and an all-purpose cleaning spray. Try the green, homemade all-purpose cleaning spray mentioned at the beginning of this article.
- Be sure to wipe surfaces after playgroups and when kids have been sick.
- Load dishwasher-safe toys on the top rack and wash on a mild cycle. Avoid using detergents with bleach because they can cause toys to fade.
- Organize, group and reassemble toys while your kids sleep. I take this time to check and replace batteries — this makes toys seem like new.
- Have a 15-minute family cleanup session in the evenings. In my house, we set a timer, put on some upbeat music and work together.

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