



BRANCH BASICS HOME CLEANSE SERIES:  
**THE 3 R'S TO SAFER CLEANING**

A GUIDE BY MARILEE NELSON

We invite and challenge you to implement our 3R's method – *review, remove, replace* – to tackle your cleaning products and see how you feel after a day, a week, a month. Our bet is that you'll never want to use anything but fragrance-free, truly non-toxic products again, especially for laundry. Once you remove the harmful chemicals from your daily life and your body gets a break, you'll likely begin to notice symptoms such as skin rashes, headaches, dry eyes, muscle tightness and more that you may not have previously connected as reactions to harmful chemicals in your cleaning products. Throughout my years of consulting, I have seen babies, children and adults transform into healthier, smarter, calmer, happier versions of themselves simply after implementing the steps below. Removing *all* harmful products from our home was the missing key that finally enabled my son to start healing from severe chemical injury and brain damage due to a catastrophic exposure to pesticides. He is now fully recovered, an outcome thought to be medically impossible, and living a full and independent life with his wife and three children.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

Cleaning products are the most toxic category of products found in the home after [pesticides](#). So first remove all pesticides from your home using our [Pesticide Resource Guide](#), then do the following:

### STEP 1: REVIEW

Do a sweep of your home (and attached garage if you have one) and pull out all cleaning products you are currently using and any lurking in the back of cabinets and closets. (Most people have dozens of different cleaning products!) Review the labels and look for toxic red flags and ingredients. See below for a basic list of offenders.

### STEP 2: REMOVE

Remove all products from your home that don't meet the guidelines below. (Yes, even those "clean" smelling wipes you're tempted to keep in case of emergency or the products sealed shut that you hate to throw away or store outside.) Either properly dispose or put in an airtight container kept outside of the house. We recommend this BPA free, phthalate free, biocide free [airtight plastic container](#). These products will no longer be a part of your home's chemical soup and you can use any on a one-by-one basis until you make further decisions or have all of your replacement products lined up.

Check in with [Earth911.com](#) for disposal rules in your area. Just type in your zip and your options will appear. Many cities have regular collection days or local collection sites that can take the waste off your hands and dispose of them properly. Contact your local Department of Public Works for more options.

### STEP 3: REPLACE

Replace your cleaning products with ones that are truly non-toxic and human-safe. There are inexpensive DIY recipes, pure soaps, and of course Branch Basics products that can safely and effectively clean, so don't let this step overwhelm or inhibit you from the whole process!

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A CLEANING PRODUCT IS HARMFUL?

Reviewing labels on conventional cleaning products is simple. While all ingredients must be listed on labels of skin and body care products, there is no federal regulation of chemicals in household cleaning products. So, no safety standard and no requirement for listing of ingredients. Many of these products should be disposed of at a hazardous waste facility and can cause injury if handled improperly – they pose a threat not only to people, but the environment as well.

There are many “non-toxic” and “natural” products available that are biodegradable and environmentally safe, however, it is not enough to use those label claims as a reason to keep a product. Many have their own toxic red flag ingredients and may have potential for harm.

### HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- + **CAUTION, WARNING or DANGER** - A quick scan of a bottle of most conventional cleaners will reveal these three EPA signal words required by law for products that contain harmful ingredients
- + Warnings of **EYE, SKIN, or RESPIRATORY IRRITATION**
- + Directions recommending **RUBBER GLOVES or MASK**
- + Directions that require **VENTILATION** while using the product
- + Instructions for **HAZARDOUS WASTE DISPOSAL**
  - The fact that the EPA classifies oven cleaners, drain cleaners, wood and metal cleaners, polishes, toilet cleaners, tile tub and shower cleaners and laundry bleach as hazardous waste validates our recommendation for removal. If you can't throw them in your garbage, do you want them all over your house? These products typically contain synthetic petroleum-based surfactants. Products with these toxic red flags should be put in the box to be removed from the house.
- + A **"COMBUSTIBLE" or "FLAMMABLE"** warning

+ **CHLORINE BLEACH** - Classified as a pesticide under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act, it is highly irritating and corrosive to the skin, lungs, and eyes. Fumes from bleach can cause DNA damage, cancer, asthma, and a host of other illnesses.

+ **DISINFECTANT OR SANITIZER** – Non-alcohol-based products contain EPA registered pesticides

+ **FRAGRANCE**

- Synthetic fragrances have been linked to asthma, allergies, skin irritation, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, obesity, cancer, nervous system, respiratory, and endocrine disruption. Look for red flag words – “fragrance”, “parfum” or indications on the label of a “fresh clean smell.” This is a concern with many “non-toxic” cleaners.
- Many essential oils are processed with solvents that have harmful VOCs, so botanical fragrances should be organic or wildcrafted and must be extracted through distillation, not with solvents.
- Studies have found that terpenes in pine, lemon, and orange oils react with ozone from outside air to create secondary toxic compounds such as formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, acetone, and ultrafine particles in the indoor air. Avoid use on Ozone Alert Days.

+ **UNSCENTED PRODUCTS** - Even conventional products labeled as "unscented" or "free and clear" can contain masking agents that are added to simply cover up fragrance with another toxic chemical. Always look for an ingredient list and not just the unscented claim.

+ **PETROLEUM BASED INGREDIENTS** - An ending of "ol" or "ene" is likely an indication of a petroleum-based product or coal tar derivative (i.e. xylol, glycol, phenol, benzene, toluene, xylene)

+ **PRESERVATIVES\***

- Some of the most popular cleaning products that claim to be non-toxic actually have antibacterial ingredients that are EPA-registered pesticides used as preservatives from the isothiazoline family such as **MIT (methylothiazolinone)** and **BIT (benzothiazolinone)** which are known skin irritants and are considered neurotoxic.

- ***Phenoxyethanol*** - preservative found in “non-toxic” cleaning products - an endocrine disruptor, neurotoxin, skin and eye irritant; phenoxyethanol is an ethoxylated compound that may be contaminated with the carcinogenic toxin 1,4-Dioxane.
- ***Benzalkonium chloride*** - a quaternary ammonium compound associated with allergies, severe skin, eye, and respiratory irritation.
- ***Potassium sorbate*** - preservative associated with skin and eye irritation
- ***Sodium benzoate*** - preservative that has been associated with eye irritation, asthma, and carcinogen formation

\*Although preservatives are usually only included in very small amounts, research shows they can actually do more harm on the delicate hormone system than large amounts. The dose does not always make the poison.

#### + SURFACTANTS

- Dig into your non-toxic products and find out what surfactants are used. Naturally-derived synthetic surfactants used in many non-toxic cleaners are made from plant-based ingredients such as coconut oil. Even though made from plants the processing steps make them synthetic. Unfortunately, many of these naturally-derived synthetic surfactants are very toxic to aquatic life, are known carcinogens, have toxic byproducts such as 1-4 dioxane and nitrosamine, and are rated very high as a skin irritant. The exceptions are the alkyl glucosides - coco glucoside, lauryl glucoside, and decyl glucoside - which are EU (European Union) Cosmetic Directive approved for skin, body, and baby care, have no carcinogens or toxic byproducts and are biodegradable.

For any other ingredient in question go to:

- **Made Safe Hazard List of Chemicals, Materials and Ingredients**
- **EWG’s Skin Deep Cosmetics Database** - search the ingredients. The ingredients are rated 1 - 10 - with 1 being the safest to 10 being the most toxic.
- **EWG’s Healthy Cleaners Database** - search by product. The products are rated A-F with A being the safest and F being the most toxic.
- **ThinkDirty®** app. Just scan the product barcode and Think Dirty will give you easy-to-understand info on the product and its ingredients!

We recommend that your cleaning products have ingredients rated a 1 on EWG Skin Deep, an A rating on EWG Healthy Cleaners Database, or a zero on Think Dirty.

## WHY REMOVAL IS THE MOST IMPORANT STEP

This is the step that creates your healthy home! If you do no other step, do this one and take it seriously as chemicals escape even through sealed lids. Crucial to the entire process is the complete removal of pesticides and toxic cleaning products. If you decide instead to store them away somewhere inside “just in case”, or “see if it really affects me”, you are allowing dangerous chemicals and toxic pesticides to linger in your home and continue to be a detriment to your health and the health of all those you live with. We know it sounds extreme, but having a few products here and there hijacks the intention to establish your home as a safe haven. The presence of these products, even in small amounts, hinders the ability for the body to maintain optimum health and/or go into full healing mode. You may need to make a few sweeps of your home.

We encourage you to view this as an opportunity to take proactive preventative care of your family’s health! It costs no money to remove these products from inside your home and will likely save money in the long run with reduced doctor visits. Know that every single item you remove will result in an improvement in your home environment, and thus your family’s health! We’ve seen it happen time and time again!

## IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR HOME’S AIR QUALITY

Just the simple act of removal improves the air quality, creates your healthy home, and takes a tremendous load off the body’s detoxification system, increasing its capacity for handling unexpected exposures to chemicals, natural pollens, dust and mold. It also strengthens the body’s resistance to viruses and bacterial infection and frees the body to use its energy to rejuvenate and heal if there is illness.

If you want further improvement, ventilate and vacuum.

When weather permits, one of the simplest ways to freshen the air in your home is to open the windows and turn on a fan. Circulate fresh air and flush residual VOCs from the products just removed.

HEPA vacuuming helps to remove incorporated SVOCs (semi-volatile organic compounds) from pesticides and cleaning products that linger after removal (especially from porous materials). Sprinkle carpets or upholstery with baking soda (neutralizes and absorbs VOCs) and let it sit for 30 minutes before vacuuming.

## CHOOSING SAFE CLEANING PRODUCTS

If you've reached this step, you deserve a big CONGRATULATIONS! Your body thanks you! (And so should all of those who live with you!) Our body is a brilliant, self-healing machine if given the right conditions, a big one being the purity of the air we breathe. Some of the biggest culprits to our home's air quality are pesticides and toxic cleaning products, so now that you (quite literally) have a clean slate, don't settle for less. Choose safe, healthy alternatives to get rid of pests and clean up your home. The good news is you don't need an army of different products! Simplify and get back to basics.

There are plenty of [DIY cleaning recipes](#) on the Internet and plain castile soap can work for general cleaning. We created Branch Basics Concentrate and Oxygen Boost because we wanted people to have very versatile, effective options, making it easy to switch to safe cleaning without having to research a bathroom cleaner, oven cleaner, laundry detergent, etc.

Branch Basics Concentrate is a non-toxic, safe and powerful concentrated cleaning formula that is not irritating to the eyes or skin and can be diluted for virtually any cleaning use – from windows, stains and laundry to veggies, face, and pets. With typical use, one concentrate can fill 3 All-Purpose, 3 Bathroom, 3 Streak-Free, 3 Foaming Wash, and do 60 loads of laundry. *See our full [User Guide](#) for more uses.*

Branch Basics products are truly safe for your entire family, even those family members that are chemically sensitive. All of our ingredients are rated a 1 on EWG Skin Deep, an A on EWG Healthy Cleaning and a zero on Think Dirty. Please see the [Journey to Our New Formula](#) to better understand our high standards and the criteria we refused to stray away from.

As long as you avoid the warnings and ingredients above, you will be well on your way to a healthier home and healthier body! Find a short recap for easy reference on the next page.

## BASIC GUIDE TO CHOOSING SAFE CLEANING PRODUCTS

**DO BUY** products that are:

- + Human safe: not an eye irritant, not a skin irritant, not a lung irritant
- + mild surfactants - either saponified plant oils or alkyl glucosides (Decyl Glucoside, Coco Glucoside, Lauryl Glucoside)
- + plant and mineral based
- + free of harmful fragrance
- + free of harmful preservatives

**DON'T BUY** products that have:

- + Signal words like CAUTION, WARNING, OR DANGER
- + bleach
- + petroleum-based ingredients
- + EPA registered pesticides - sanitizers and disinfectants
- + parabens, phthalates, SLS
- + synthetic fragrances
- + synthetic preservatives such as methylisothiazolinone, phenoxyethanol, sodium benzoate, potassium sorbate, & benzalkonium chloride



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