



# Dirty tricks

Make cleaning easier and save money with our guide to the best (and worst) products. Plus pros share their best ideas for tackling the grungiest jobs.

**S**pending all day with a rag and a bucket isn't our idea of a great Saturday. But according to our new ShopSmart survey on cleaning, American women spend an average of 5 hours cleaning their homes every week—almost an entire workday!—and Saturday is the most popular time to do the dirty work.

The truth is we like a clean house. We might not love what we need to do to get it that way, but the results are pretty satisfying—even if they don't last more than a few hours. So we asked our expert cleaner testers as well as professional cleaning services for their best tricks to make the job faster, easier, and maybe even cheaper. See pages 24 and 25 for a list of our top-rated cleaners, plus some products you should skip. Then turn to page 27 for some surprising tools, including umbrellas and hair dryers, and other tricks of the cleaning trade that can lighten your dirty load. And don't miss our recipes for great cleaning solutions on page 84a.

JAMES WORRELL; PROP. STYLING: JEFFSTYLES.COM

# The best household cleaners

Simplify your cleaning life! These six products are all you really need.



## All-purpose

**WHAT TO BUY** Ammonia is a good all-around cleaner and it's cheap. Just dilute it according to label instructions and keep it in a labeled squirt bottle for everyday kitchen and bathroom cleaning. If you don't like the smell, buy an inexpensive cleaner with pine oil and dilute that for jobs around the house.

**TIP** For more cleaning muscle, go with a cleaner with chlorine bleach, which is also a powerful bacteria killer. But never mix bleach with ammonia!



## Dishes

**WHAT TO BUY** Dawn Direct Foam was the top gunk-buster in our dirty-plate tests. With a bit more elbow grease, Ajax Lemon Dish Liquid did the job for a lot less.

**SAVE!** Practice portion control. For a sinkful of yucky dishes you need only a teaspoon.

**TIP** Dishwashing liquid does double duty for many household cleaning jobs, but it leaves a soil-attracting sticky residue, so rinse well.



## Bathrooms

**WHAT TO BUY** Comet Scratch Free Disinfectant with Bleach is our top-rated shower scum-buster. It got the job done and left no streaks. If you want to take a more preventive approach to shower crud, buy Kaboom Shower Tub & Tile trigger-spray cleaner. But you have to use it every day to prevent soap scum and mildew. Skip the aerosol foams, which were the least effective in tests.

**SAVE!** To clean gunky bathroom walls: Fill a bucket with 3 quarts of water. Carefully add 1 quart of bleach and one-eighth cup powdered trisodium phosphate (TSP), a strong alkaline detergent sold at hardware stores; mix well.

**TIP** For a greener cleaner, try Green Works Natural. It prevents scum and mildew buildup and removes rust, but you'll need a harder-core cleaner for persistent mildew.

## Floors

**WHAT TO BUY** Read labels carefully and choose a product especially formulated for the type of flooring you have, whether it's cork, linoleum, stone, or vinyl. For wood floors, simply use a damp mop with hot water and no detergent, which can leave a dulling residue.

**TIP** Protect your floors from hard-to-remove marks and scratches by putting plastic gliders under the feet of your furniture.



## Metal

**WHAT TO BUY** You'll get the best results from specialty products designed for a particular surface, such as brass, copper, or silver. Our top-rated silver cleaner is Wright's Anti Tarnish Silver Polish.

**SAVE!** Make your own silver cleaner: Cut a piece of aluminum foil big enough to line the bottom of a plastic or glass container. Place tarnished silver on top. Sprinkle with 1 to 2 tablespoons of baking soda and cover with 2 quarts of very hot water; it will bubble. Soak the silver until the bubbles stop, then rinse and polish with a soft cloth.

**TIP** Though our tests found that special stainless-steel cleaners removed stains and fingerprints, undiluted liquid detergent or rubbing alcohol dabbed directly on spots worked just as well.



## Windows

**WHAT TO BUY** Windex No Drip worked great on indoor and outdoor window grime. (If your windows aren't too dirty, you can save money by heading over to Walmart for its Streak Free window cleaner.)

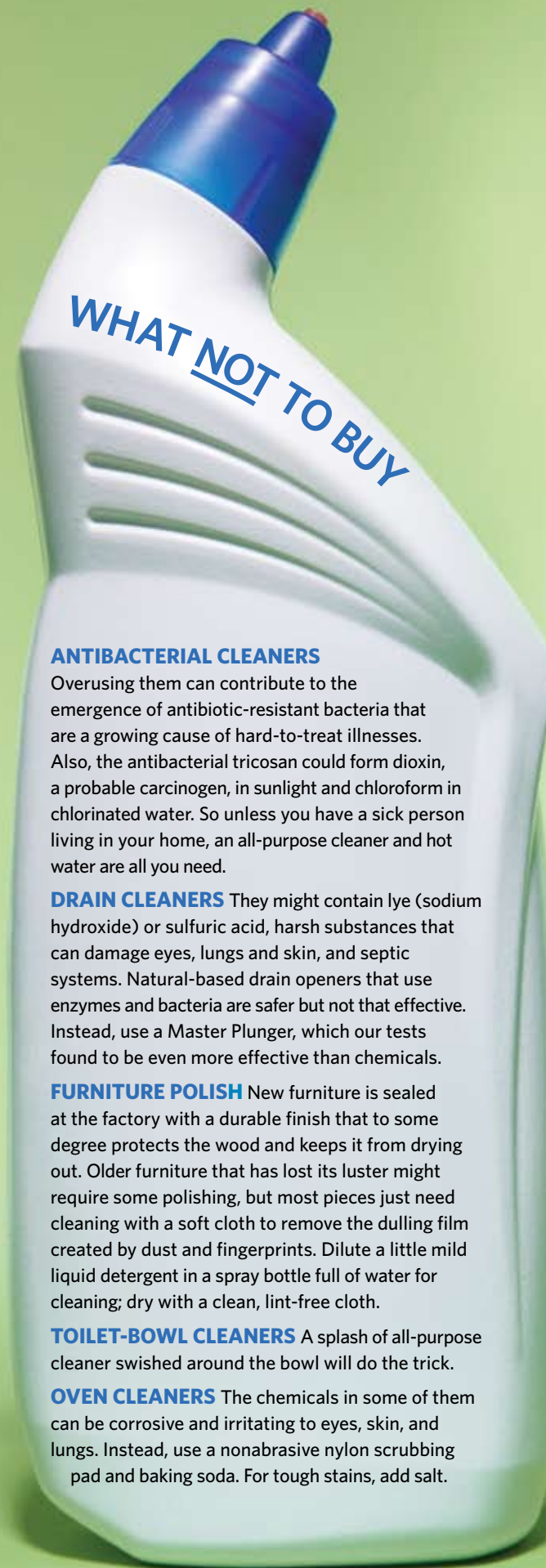
**SAVE!** Our homemade window cleaner costs about a penny per ounce, and for indoor glass grime it did just as well in our tests as regular Windex: Fill a 1- or 2-gallon bucket with 7 pints of cold water. Carefully add one-half cup ammonia and 1 pint rubbing alcohol. Mix well and pour into 1-quart spray bottles. Tint with a drop or two of blue food coloring and it will look like regular window cleaner.

**TIP** Wash windows on a cloudy day. Sunlight will cause streaking.



## Green cleaners

Many so-called green cleaners aren't always as effective as regular ones. But that doesn't mean you can't use them for light jobs and save the heavy-duty cleaners for grimmer tasks. For the greenest clean, try lemon juice for removing tarnish and white vinegar for cleaning and helping to disinfect counters. For more ideas, go to [GreenerChoices.org](http://GreenerChoices.org). If you buy cleaners, focus on ingredient lists (look for natural materials), not general labels like "natural."



## 7 SAFETY TIPS

**DO** wear gloves to protect your skin, which can be irritated by harsh products.

**DON'T** forget the goggles. Seriously! Chemicals such as ammonia can cause blindness if they splash in your eyes.

**DO** keep store-bought cleaners in their original containers. That way, you know exactly what you have, and you don't run the risk of mixing chemicals that could produce toxic fumes.

**DON'T** mix bleach with products like toilet-bowl cleaners or ammonia. When combined, they can produce deadly fumes. Also, never mix bleach with vinegar; it makes the bleach more potent and damaging, especially to fabrics.

**DO** avoid a nasty splash. Always add the water to the bucket or spray bottle first, then carefully add detergent, ammonia, bleach, or other products. That reduces the odds that a splash will hit you in the face.

**DO** lock up cleaners. Since cleaning products are often hazardous, store them in locked cabinets or on high shelves away from kids and pets.

**DON'T** flush certain solvent-based cleaners down the drain or toilet. Those include some metal and furniture cleaners, spot removers, turpentine, and anything labeled flammable. Dispose of that stuff as you would any hazardous waste. Check with your town government for guidelines.



## TOP READER TIPS

We asked ShopSmart readers for their best cleaning tricks. Here are 10 of our favorites. We'll publish more in a future issue.

**1** Clean on a sunny day; you can see more of the dirt.

—Candy Clouston, Plainfield, Ill.

**2** Spraying glass cleaner in sinks and tubs after cleaning them makes them shine.

—Mrs. Leland Smiley, Birmingham, Ala.

**3** To clean ceiling fans spray with cleaner, then slip a pillowcase over the blades and slide it off, full of dust!

—Elizabeth Hammes, Herndon, Va.

**4** Take a laundry basket from room to room; put all the items in the basket that belong elsewhere, redistributing as you clean.

—Marla Schlesinger, San Diego

**5** To clean and deodorize the refrigerator, squeeze a cut lemon and mix the juice with the same amount of water. This worked well when we had a problem with fish odor after losing power and the freezer defrosted.

—Linda Jackson, Tyngsboro, Mass.

**6** Before tossing used dryer sheets, I use them to clean off the lint and detergent spills from the outside of my washer and dryer to make them look just like new. And it doesn't take more than a minute.

—Kathi Selimshayev, Boise, Idaho

**7** Ice and a few slices of lemon in the garbage disposal freshens the kitchen.

—Ronda Thompson, Las Vegas

**8** I keep baby wipes by the door to wipe the dog's feet.

—Cheryl Davis, Westerville, Ohio

**9** Vacuum the bathroom floor before mopping. It gets the hair up and makes mopping easier.

—Jenn Zieser, Grand Rapids, Iowa

**10** I use my timer—15 minutes each day attacking clutter produces amazing results!

—Leslee Holt, Mission Viejo, Calif.

**ShopSmart readers' favorite cleaning products**

- Windex
- Clorox
- Swiffer products
- Clorox wipes
- Lysol/Lysol Cleaner

## Eyesore erasers

### How the pros tackle the toughest jobs

Umbrellas, hair dryers, and putty knives might not be in your cleaning tool kit, but professional cleaning services and home stagers have a bag of clever tricks they use to make houses look and smell good enough to buy. So we turned to them for advice on how to get rid of some of the most annoying and embarrassing eyesores around the house—we're talking about things like gross grout, mildew spots, dusty chandeliers, and other dirty jobs that require you to go beyond your ordinary cleaning routine.

#### Dirty baseboards and molding

They jut out just enough to catch dust, says Kristen Groves of Merry Maids in South Austin, Texas, who recommends hand-washing baseboards and molding with warm water and a floor cleaner like Murphy Oil Soap. But most important, she says, apply the mixture with a microfiber cleaning cloth, because it will pick up more dirt with a lot less exertion. Microfiber cloths that have been treated to attract and hold dust (not to be confused with Swiffer products) are also washable.

#### Grungy grout

You can put out luxurious towels and soaps and scrub the sink and toilet until they sparkle, but if the grout between tiles is discolored, the bathroom still looks dirty. The solution: Try to remove the stains with a toothbrush dipped in a solution of one part bleach and six parts water. You can also use a special grout cleaner and a grout brush—its narrow head and slim handle make it easier to clean in corners and tight spaces. If that doesn't work, Barb Schwarz, co-author of "Home Staging: The Winning Way to Sell Your House for More Money" (Wiley, 2006), recommends going at grout with fine steel wool (from the hardware store) and Krud Kutter, an all-purpose cleaner that she uses for

just about everything. Work it into the grout with a circular motion using the steel wool, let it sit for a few minutes, and then wipe it down with a damp sponge to remove any remaining dirt.

#### Cloudy chandeliers

To make crystal chandeliers sparkle again, use white cotton gloves. Dip one hand into a bowl of window cleaner and use the other to dry. You can also use a mixture of one-third of a cup of vinegar and two-thirds of a cup of water. As long as you're using a streak-free cleaner, Groves says, you can just spray it directly on the chandelier. Place an upside-down umbrella on the floor to catch the drips while it dries. No rinsing required.

**Add a few drops of tea-tree oil to water in a spray bottle and use it to prevent shower mildew.**

#### Mold and mildew spots

Don't let them spread. Clean mold and mildew as soon as you see them, wiping walls, grout, and plastic shower liners with a special mildew-

removal product or a solution of one part bleach and four parts water. You can machine-wash most shower curtains and liners. If that doesn't work, spray mildew with the diluted bleach solution and let it sit for half an hour. Scrub off, then rinse. **TIP** When working with bleach, make sure the area is well ventilated and wear gloves and old clothes. To prevent mold and mildew, Cori Morenberg of Ms. Green-Clean in New York City recommends adding a few drops of tea-tree oil (found at health-food stores) to water in a spray bottle. Spray on stall walls, tub, and curtain liner or door after each shower. Also, make sure to turn on a fan or open windows.

#### Soap-scummed shower doors

To remove soap scum, Morenberg says to mix an all-purpose cleaner like Ecover with water. Dip a metal wire scouring pad in the mix, add a dab of cleanser to the pad, and scrub away (or use Kaboom).

#### Scaly showerheads

Use a cleanser regularly to prevent deposits from building up. If a metal showerhead becomes clogged with scaly deposits, the best way to clean it is to cook out the gunk: Remove the



showerhead from the fixture, place it in a pot with one part vinegar and eight parts water, bring to a boil, and simmer for about 15 minutes. Soak a plastic showerhead in a solution of equal parts vinegar and hot water.

#### Filthy blinds and louvers

For regular cleaning, use the brush attachment on your vacuum cleaner. But when blinds, shutters, or louvered doors are really filthy, use an all-purpose cleaner and scrub them slat by slat. To make the tedious job go faster, Groves wraps a cleaner-treated cloth around the end of a putty knife or scraper (you'll need a good 2 to 4 inches of surface area). Another method: Put on cotton gloves with pieces of cotton stuffed in the fingers for extra absorbency. Then dip the gloves into a detergent solution and run your hands over the slats. Wipe with a dry cloth or a dry pair of cotton gloves. Sabrina Soto, the host of HGTV's "Get It Sold," suggests putting old socks on your hands, spraying them with cleaner, and using your fingers to get between each slat.

Then, Soto says, go over the slats with the same kind of dryer sheets you use when doing laundry. The sheets eliminate static, so the blinds or louvers will attract less dust in the future.

#### Use a hair dryer on the cool setting or canned air to blow dust buildup off lamp shades.

#### Dirty bookshelves

Yeah, we know, it's a pain to remove all those books. But if you want them white-glove clean, that's what you have to do, and use a microfiber cloth that attracts and holds dust. If you don't have the time and energy to clean shelves thoroughly, cheat! Just vacuum the front of the shelves with the crevice tool. Also, vacuuming floors around the shelves regularly can prevent dust from collecting on your books.

#### Dusty lamp shades

Use a hair dryer on the cool setting to blow dust buildup off lamp shades, or try canned air, the kind made for cleaning computer keyboards. If the shade's really ugly, Groves says, wipe it using an all-purpose cleaner on a microfiber cloth. Then vacuum with the brush attachment.

#### Grimy stovetops

Groves suggests using a product made for degreasing or a homemade paste of baking soda and water. After applying it to the surface with a sponge or cloth, let it sit for 3 to 5 minutes, then wipe clean. Buff with a microfiber cloth.

#### Scuff-marked floors

To clean shoe scuff marks from wood floors, wipe with an all-purpose cleaner. Sealed-finish floors will take a little more elbow grease: Rub with fine steel wool and a wood-floor cleaner. Then wipe dry and polish. You can remove scuff marks from linoleum with paint thinner or a citrus-based cleaner. Remove heel marks from vinyl flooring with baking soda on a damp sponge or cloth.

## 9 tools for getting at every crevice

#### FEATHER DUSTER

for cleaning knickknacks, photo frames, and other lightweight objects.

#### WHITE COTTON GLOVES

for cleaning chandeliers and between the slats of Venetian blinds.

#### DISPOSABLE SWIFFER CLOTHS

for cleaning dust magnets like computer and TV screens, all kinds of hard surfaces like tabletops and floors, and even car dashboards.

**TIP** Keep one in your car and do a quick swipe when you're at a stoplight.

#### SCRUB BRUSH

with a handle for miscellaneous cleaning tasks.

#### MICROFIBER CLOTH

for catching and holding dust.

#### COTTON SWABS

to get into tiny crevices in plastic bath mats, silver, and other small, hard-to-reach spots.

#### TILE GROUT BRUSHES

with a single row of stiff bristles for scrubbing between ceramic tiles. You can also use a toothbrush.

#### LINT-FREE DUST CLOTHS

made of 100 percent cotton for cleaning easily scratched items; other fabrics used as rags can create lint and are abrasive.

#### LAMBSWOOL DUSTERS

or dust mops for wiping large surfaces, even walls, to pick up dust and cobwebs. The head can be removed and washed. Or save yourself a few bucks and make your own dust mop by wrapping an old cotton rag around the end of a broomstick.

## Coming clean

How do you feel about cleaning? Don't mind it? Hate it? Here's what more than 1,000 women in our new national poll told us about their cleaning habits.

### How immaculate is YOUR home?

**88%** clean toilets once a week or more.

**79%** vacuum once a week or more.

**70%** mop the floors once a week or more.

**64%** dust the furniture once a week or more.

**76%** make their bed every day.

**36%** have made areas off-limits to guests because the rooms weren't clean.

**75%** said their home is as clean or cleaner than the one they grew up in.

**7%** wash the windows once a week or more. (25% said they either never wash the windows or wash them only when company is coming.)

## Saturday

The most popular day of the week to clean

(24% said they clean their homes regularly during the week; Monday and Friday are the most popular weekdays.)

**5** The average hours a week spent cleaning.

#### THE MOST-HATED CLEANING JOBS

**Scrubbing toilets and showers/tubs**

(Those chores were tied at about 25% each.)

#### THE LEAST HATED

**Vacuuming**

(41% said it was preferable to sweeping, dusting, mopping, and other chores.)

### Who does the dirty work?

**83%** of married women said they do the majority of the cleaning in their household.

**5%** said their spouse does the majority of the cleaning.

**56%** said their spouse helps with the cleaning.

**26%** said that the amount of cleaning their spouse is doing is declining.

**37%** said that they have arguments with their spouse about cleaning the house.

## And the biggest surprise:

**Only 7% said they hate cleaning their home.**

(25% said that they love cleaning or find it relaxing. No wonder we get stuck with the dirty work!)