

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Spring Forward with a Healthy Home

Written by Carin Booth, FACS Extension Agent, Hall County



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Green Cleaning **Know your ingredients.**

Alkalis: Good for removing oily dirt. Examples are baking soda, borax and washing soda.

Acids: Useful for removing hard water deposits, discoloration, and stains. Examples are vinegar, and lemon juice.

Surfactants: Used to cut grease and grab onto the dirt to help remove it from the surface. They are found in soaps and detergents.

Abrasives: Used to scour off dirt and particulate matter. Examples are steel wool, and a nylon mesh scrubber.



Spring is only a few weeks away so it is the time of year that spring cleaning usually comes to mind. When the weather heats up and things start to bloom, we find people excited to open up their homes and shake the winter blues. It is a great time to get rid of the dust and dirt that has collected in your home over the winter months.

Follow these simple tips to get your spring cleaning journey started:

- ◆ Plan for a thorough cleaning in every room of the house. Consider starting in bedrooms or bathrooms.
- ◆ Start by laundering sheets, towels, and linens and vacuum surfaces such as mattresses, pillows, and bed skirts.
- ◆ Vacuum rugs, under furniture, around appliances and any other “hard to reach places” that you may avoid in surface cleanings throughout the year.
- ◆ Be sure to dust surfaces using a clean, soft microfiber cloth.
- ◆ Wash all floors and walls, especially in bathrooms and kitchens using an all-purpose floor cleaner. Using a damp mop instead of a broom will help. Try one of the simple green cleaning recipes for all-purpose cleaner:
- ◆ Don't forget about closets and storage areas. Be sure to launder any winter items you plan to store to avoid attracting unwanted pests during storage.
- ◆ Visit your medicine cabinets and dispose of medicines out of date or no longer used safely. The [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) has directions for safe medicine disposal. You can also visit local drugstores for medical disposal kiosks in many locations.

Consider making your own cleaning products with simple recipes using many items you already have in your home. You can locate these recipes on the [UGA Extension Green Cleaning website](#).

One important thing to remember is that you cannot tackle all of this at once. Pace yourself and involve family and children in tasks that are age appropriate. Make spring cleaning a family affair!



Soap vs. Detergent: How are they different?

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Extension Agent, Crisp County

Did you know laundry soap and laundry detergent are not the same thing? We often use the terms interchangeably, but detergents and soaps have distinctive characteristics. Let's dive into some of those differences throughout this article. They both are surfactants or surface-active agents. These compounds combine with grease and water for washing. Soaps are those made from natural materials found in nature. Soaps come from water-soluble sodium or potassium salts of fatty acids. Detergents are synthetic materials (although sometimes they have natural ingredients) and are made up of one or more surfactants. Because the surfactants are less sensitive than soap to hardness in water, they will not form a film.

Fun fact

During War World I & II detergents using solvents had their beginning, because the materials to make laundry soaps were scarce. The shortage of animal and vegetable fats and oils meant manufacturers looked toward readily available resources like petroleum to make detergent.



A drawback to washing with laundry soaps is that an insoluble film might be left behind on the clothes you are washing or a grayish tint might be left on the clothing because of the chemical interaction. Laundry detergents react to those same minerals in the water. When picking out detergents and soaps, look for recipes that are biodegradable to ensure the least possible damage to the environment.

The cleaning process begins with the liquid and in the case of laundry — the water, where the properties of that liquid change as surfactants that are introduced. During the cleaning process, surface-active agents are the chemicals that helping the general process begin. Mechanical energy releases the oily dirt from the fabric as the surfactant lowers the surface tension of the fabric. There is plenty of chemistry in the process, but surfactants and builders are the major components of cleaning products. Many other ingredients are mixed to be more specific and target more unique laundry needs.

The soap and detergent work through chemical energy, thermal energy and mechanical energy. Chemical energy is provided by the soap or detergent. Thermal energy is provided by warm or hot water. Mechanical energy is provided by a machine or hands. It takes a proper balance of each energy type to effectively clean. For a perfect example of how we go from red clay in those baseball pants back to bright white baseball pants, just picture the oily, greasy soil on the pants, then add soap or detergent to the washing machine (mechanical energy) and add warm water (thermal energy). These opposing forces begin to loosen the soil and suspend it in the water. Suddenly the water is dirty and the clothes are clean!

Remember that all soaps and detergents can be dangerous and poisonous and should always be kept out of reach of children and pets.

Resources:

[Soaps & detergents: Chemistry \(Surfactants\) - American Cleaning Institute](#)

[Soaps and Detergents](#)

[Soaps & Detergents: Surfactants & Builders](#) (ACI)



Simple Ways to Keep Children Safe Outdoors

Written by Dr. Diane Bales, Human Development Extension Specialist, Athens,

As the weather starts to warm up, children and their teachers look forward to spending more time outside. Whether you are planning time for active play, moving “indoor” activities to the outdoor space, or helping children learn science by planting a garden, safety matters. Here are some simple ways to help keep children safe from injuries outdoors.

- ◆ **Inspect the outdoor space regularly.** A staff member should walk around the playground or other outdoor space each morning before children arrive. Look for broken glass, damaged equipment, and items like adult gardening tools that need to be out of children’s reach. Check gates to be sure they are securely locked. Schedule a time each month for an in-depth playground inspection using [DECAL’s playground maintenance checklist](#).
- ◆ **Know your plants!** Access to nature is an important part of young children’s learning, but some plants can be harmful if touched or ingested. Be sure children’s play space is free of plants with sharp thorns, poison ivy, and other hazardous plants. The [Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia](#) has a list of plants that are poisonous when ingested. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) has pictures of the most common plants that cause extreme irritation when touched.
- ◆ **Supervise actively.** Outdoor play is a part of the classroom curriculum, not a “break time” for staff. Teachers should distribute themselves around the play space, and should watch and listen to children carefully. Many injuries can be prevented if staff are paying careful attention.
- ◆ **Monitor water play carefully.** Young children can drown in seconds in only a few inches of water. If children are engaged in water play, at least one adult needs to be monitoring that activity directly and carefully to ensure children are safe.
- ◆ **Don’t “boost” children up.** It may seem natural to lift a child up or help a child climb a little higher, but providing an extra boost can be dangerous. Children who get help climbing higher than they are able to do alone do not understand the limits of their motor skills. These children may try to climb higher than they are ready to handle, or jump down without help. Instead of lifting children up, offer verbal guidance and encouragement for them to climb independently.



Sumac
Image source: USDA



Poison Ivy
Image source: Pixabay



Poison Oak
Image source: USDA

Healthy Playgrounds Tip

Written by Dr. Diane Bales, Human Development Extension Specialist, Athens, GA

Regular playground maintenance helps keep children safe. Walk the Early Childhood Education playground every morning before children arrive. Be alert for broken glass, unlocked gates, and other hazards. Use the [DECAL playground maintenance checklist](#) at least once a month to make sure your playground is in good repair.



Healthy Home Hacks

Remove white water marks on wood by mixing equal parts of vinegar and olive oil. Apply to the stain with a soft cloth, rubbing with the wood grain. Use a second soft cloth to shine it. ~ Pamela Turner

Remove grease stains on the wall with a mixture of dish soap and water (1/4 teaspoon of soap in 1 cup of warm water). If that doesn't work, try 1:3 mixture of white vinegar to water. ~ Pamela Turner

Soothe your senses while cleaning your sink by steeping herbs from your garden (like thyme and rosemary) in hot water for a couple hours. Strain out the herbs and pour the herb water into your sink and let it sit overnight. It will help to make the metal shine without using any abrasives on it. ~ Pamela Turner



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