

Parenting Greenly, eco-nomical ways to live happier.

Parenting Greenly: Saving the planet one soccer game at a time

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Saving the planet one soccer game at a time

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Chapter 3: My New BFF? Baking Soda! A Super Eco-Friendly Household Cleaner

Are Eco-Cleaning Products Worth the Cost?

I'm intrigued by all the neat displays of eco-cleaning products, I was eager to spend the time and money researching new products for my column. What really works, what smells the best? Could there be aromatherapy in housework? And which products were basically the same old things with a "green" label slapped on them by their marketing departments? I was actually looking forward to donning rubber gloves and getting down to the nitty, gritty (pun intended) for this column. But then a nagging little voice kept telling me to wait before dashing out to buy, buy, buy.

Low Cost Cleaning Supplies

Meanwhile, my oven nagged even louder. It needed cleaning. Bad! I couldn't even remember the last time it had been done. And I cook a lot. So everything that had splattered and spilled over was pretty much not leaving without a fight. Somewhere I'd read that baking soda and water could clean an oven as well as the commercial products that literally took my breath away. Testing this advice in my disgusting oven would provide a challenge - no doubt about it. If baking soda and water could do this job without my arm being hammered, it could certainly make yours sparkle. But I had to see it to believe it.

How to Clean an Oven with Baking Soda

I removed the oven racks and used a spray bottle filled with tap water to moisten the top sides and bottom of the oven. Then I sprinkled $\frac{3}{4}$ of a box of baking soda all around. Skeptical but satisfied I was giving this method a fair chance, I was

already planning a “real” cleaning to be done the following weekend. I let the mixture set for 5 hours.

During my son’s naptime, I spread newspapers below the oven door and grabbed a wet sponge. With the first swipe – the blue speckled enamel was visible again. The baking soda mixture was a lot easier to wipe up than using a gazillion paper towels to remove the gunk from aerosol can cleaners. Rough patches took just slightly more effort – a nylon bristle brush came in handy - but not even on the worst spots did I have to huff and puff to remove the baked on grit. Not that it would have killed me to put a little muscle into it, but it wasn’t necessary and I appreciated the fact, that if I had to put my head into an oven, I didn’t have to gasp for fresh air. Now to steal a line from The Monkees, “I’m a believer.”

Baking Soda Cleans Silver, Too

The next week, I noticed a silver baby cup on display in Nate’s room had tarnished. Afraid I might scratch the silver, I did a test rub with baking soda and water on the bottom of the cup. No scratches. I then buffed the rest of the cup using a soft cloth and a light hand. Easy. A miracle. I think I’m on to something.

Baking Soda Cleans Bathtubs, Too

The next day, I tackled the bathtub. Again I don’t want to admit what a lousy housekeeper I am, but the tub had a ring that wasn’t going away with a soft bubbly, foaming product. And though I knew the old standbys – cheap, powdered stuff - worked, I hated breathing in the dust so I sprinkled the last of the box of baking soda on one side and bubbly stuff on the other. There was no contest. My new BFF (Best Friend Forever – baking soda) won hands down.

Virtually all products on the cleaning supplies aisle green or not, include warnings to “Keep out of reach of children,” and “Eye irritant.” Why should we keep those in our homes if we don’t have to?

Don’t Forget to Use Vinegar for Cleaning, Too

Now a word about another non-glamorous household product – vinegar. Vinegar gets a bad rap. It isn’t sexy. It doesn’t come in cute little, shapely bottles, but awkward gallon jugs. It has a strong smell for sure, but it’s nontoxic and gosh darn it – it gets the job done! And like baking soda, it costs almost nothing.

Commercial Ice-Maker Cleaner Vs. Vinegar

When Gretchen Cook had a kitchen appliance that required \$18-a pint cleanser to be run through it periodically, she succumbed to vinegar as an alternative. She said the machine worked better after one cleaning with vinegar than two run-throughs with the expensive stuff.

Vinegar on Windows

Gretchen also suggested using vinegar to clean windows. My three-year-old always wants to “help Mommy,” so taking Gretchen’s advice, Nate and I teamed up to remove fingerprints and other mysterious smudges from our patio’s sliding glass door. Using newspaper and straight vinegar (which could have been diluted with water), we washed the windows easily and without any streaking. And when

Nate inadvertently splashed some vinegar on his head, it didn't send me into a panic to flush his eyes with water.

I could do the research on those focus group-tested, heavily marketed "green" products, but I don't want to pay for them. And I doubt you really do either. Instead, I'm tossing baking soda and vinegar in my shopping cart and using the money saved for primo treats for myself and my family like Ben & Jerry's New York Super Fudge Chunk ice cream, or a truly good hunk of *parmigianna-reggiano*. What would you do with the money you'd save? Send your comments [here](#).

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