Sustainable DIY Laundry Solutions: The Secrets Detergent Companies Don’t Want You To Know

Living a life that’s light on the planet is important to you. Why else would you be on this site? You probably buy organic whenever possible and reject gas-guzzling SUVs in favor of eco-friendly engine options. Perhaps you only permit planet-safe products to join you in the shower by choosing natural body washes. However, one glaring area of the American lifestyle has been grotesquely missed by the natural living trend. If you’re like most people, there’s a really good chance you don’t think twice about the chemicals your clothes keep close to your skin every day.

Few possessions are more intimately used than the clothes on your body. Doesn’t it make sense to keep toxic chemicals far away from them?

Laundry Detergent? It Can’t Be THAT Bad… Can It?

Oh, but it can. Take the time to read the ingredients list on your regular detergent sometime. How many terms do you recognize? While smart sounding scientific names aren’t always a sign that a product is loaded with toxins, in the case of most detergents this isn’t far from the truth.

In fact, research has shown that the laundry room is usually one of the most polluted rooms in your entire house. Detergents are to blame. These prettily packaged products are filled with as many as 25 volatile organic compounds- seven of

which have been shown to be toxic to breathe in. For this reason, the EPA considers the air inside your home to be as much as five times more polluted than the great outdoors. Yikes.

Detergent's Cost to the Natural World

The danger in detergents comes from their scents. Far removed from their natural-sounding names, most laundry fragrances are actually a cocktail of chemicals designed to degrade as slowly as possible to give you a "just been cleaned" feeling all day long.

Your mind might associate these scents with pleasant vistas and spring fed streams, but the truth is that these chemicals are actually actively destroying the places they make you reminisce about. The status quo for the EPA is to let the vast majority of these chemicals pass through the cracks of their testing every year, assuming that the majority of their chemical creations are "safe until proven otherwise". This makes the detergent-buying population into non-consenting guinea pigs happy to smell like a mountain spring, unaware of the damage they are unintentionally doing to these same sacred wild spaces.

When you do a load of laundry, you are fouling our limited water supply with toxic chemicals that eventually make their way into rivers and ponds. The soap in detergents actually "cleans off" the natural mucous on fish scales, making it easy for fish to absorb any of the 80,000 different chemicals used commercially in the United States directly through their skin. These chemicals have a range of impacts, from reducing the effectiveness of breeding to killing fish eggs and even causing widespread deaths throughout vast swatches of water. Worst of all, this chemical damage works its way right up the food chain and stricken seabirds, larger fish, and even the

humans who eat them.

The Sinister Effects For Your Health

Unbeknownst to most people, skin is your body's biggest organ. This stretchy layer of cells actually operates as a semi-permeable barrier that lets plenty of microscopic substances shift in and out. This is great news for aromatherapy adherents and smokers relying on nicotine patches, but not so good if you look too closely at your detergent label. Each of these chemicals, 4-dioxane, benzoxazolyl, polyalkylene quaternium-15:, can be found in most detergents. They are a big cause for concern if you care about your reproductive health, staving off allergic reactions, and staying cancer free.

Worst of all, these chemicals aren't something you are exposed to only on laundry day. Instead, they come with you wherever your clothes go. Traces of these chemicals create fumes you constantly breathe in, and even tiny amounts can agitate your breathing and cause headaches, neurological problems, and allergy flare-ups.

If that's not enough to scare you off, keep in mind that the long-term effects of these combinations of chemicals are almost completely unknown.

Sustainable Alternatives to Commercial Detergents

Unless you shed your layers and opt to join a nudist colony instead, washing your clothes is probably not optional. However, you have plenty of control over the kinds of chemicals you expose your cotton to. Below are some of my all-time favorite detergent alternatives that will keep your

clothes clean without putting your health or the environment at risk.

Toss aside your dreadful detergent bottle and try one (or all) of these clothes cleaning methods instead! Trust me, you won’t be going back.

Soap Nuts

Why use detergent at all? In truth, soap nuts are an out of the box way to clean your clothes that still manages to be shockingly effective. As the fruits of the Mukorossi tree, soap “nuts” are native to the Himalayas, though they are grown in arid climates around the world. The Mukorossi tree’s gift to the world is that its berries are filled with a natural surfactant called saponin that naturally interacts with water in a way that agitates dirt off clothing, binds dirt particles to soap molecules, and makes it simple to wash these particles directly down the drain.

Besides their effectiveness for keeping clothes clean, there’s a lot to like about soap nuts. Not only do they thrive in areas ill-suited for other kinds of agriculture, they also prevent erosion on the steep mountain slopes where they grow best. They are a perfect option for gray water systems because the nuts are 100% biodegradable and actually act as a natural form of fertilizer wherever they end up. Best of all, soap nuts require minimal packaging and often come in eco-friendly boxes that are a cinch to recycle.

At first glance, these nuts may seem confusing to use, but in truth, the process couldn’t be simpler. All you need to do is place five nuts in a drawstring bag (normally included with your nut purchase) and toss it into the washing machine. No need to fret about pulling the nuts about before the start of the rinse cycle; they can stay right in until the very end! You can also say goodbye to fabric softeners and other detergents, as these simple nuts will do it all. In most

cases, you can get five to ten washes out of your nuts before they become papery thin and translucent. At this point, it’s time to toss them in the compost bin and start again.

Looking to buy some soap nuts? They can be found online through many organic distributors like Eco Nuts.

Homemade Detergents

If you’re looking to stick with cleaning solutions a little more familiar, there are plenty of ways to make your own homemade detergents that get your clothes as clean as any chemical-laden commercial product. Not only will you be making your health a priority, you’ll also be saving money and becoming more self-sufficient in the process.

Here are some simple tips to make eco-friendly swaps in your laundry routine.

Switch out your fabric softener and add a ½ cup white vinegar to the rinse cycle.

Baking soda is a great way to scrub away stains and brighten colors. Just make a simple pre-treatment with baking soda, water, and washing soda to get a deep cleanse for your clothes.

Ditch your dryer sheets by making your own. All it takes is a few drops of essential oil added to a damp rag that’s thrown right in with your sodden laundry. You can also use recycled wool dryer balls to fluff up your clothes while reducing static.

Homemade Liquid Laundry Detergent

This simple recipe is so easy it will quickly replace all your commercial detergent needs. Best of all, you can change the scent based on what type of soap you choose to use.

All you need to do is combine one bar of grated soap with 2 quarts water, and slowly heat the mix until the soap has fully dissolved. Next, add 4.5 gallons of piping hot tap water to a five-gallon bucket, and stir in 2 cups each of washing soda and borax. Pour in your stove top soap mixture and stir everything together. Cover the container and let it sit overnight before pouring it into easy to use containers. To use, all you need to do is add a half cup per medium load and your clothes will soon be clean and fresh.

If you have trouble finding washing soda at the store, you can make your own.

Homemade Laundry Powder

Why rely on liquids when powdered detergents are so much simpler to use? Not only are they easier to store, they also don’t need any preservation agents to keep them safe. You can make your own top quality laundry detergent by mixing three cups of Borax with two cups each of washing soda, grated, all natural soap (like Ivory Soap) and baking soda. Blend everything together and store it in an airtight container. To use, all you need to do is measure out two tablespoons for a medium sized load.

Homemade All-In-One Laundry Pods

If you can’t help your preference for convenient laundry solutions, you don’t have to forgo your favorite laundry pods if you’re committed to natural solutions. Instead, you can make your own single-use laundry pods with ease by following these instructions. Simply blend 1 ½ cups washing soda with a grated bar of natural soap and 2 Tbsp Epsom salts. After thoroughly mixing, and 3 Tbsp of hydrogen peroxide and ¼ cup vinegar. When mixed, add 15-20 drops of your favorite essential oil.

Once everything is blended together, it should resemble wet

sand and clump well together. Cover a cookie pan with parchment paper and measure out rounded tablespoons of the mix, tapping them against the side of the bowl to ensure they clump together. Let these pods dry for eight hours before storing them in airtight containers. When it’s time to do a load, simple toss a pod right in with your clothes.

So, What Did We Learn?

If you’ve been thoughtless with your laundry habits in the past, the time has come to make a change for the better. Commercial detergents may make your clothing squeaky clean, but they come at a significant cost to health for you and the planet.

A better option? Turn towards sustainable laundry solutions and try out soap nuts or some homemade detergents to keep your clothes clean. You’ll save money, reduce the amount of obnoxious packaging ending up in landfills, and keep the planet in better shape for future generations to enjoy.

Clearly, swapping out your commercial detergent for a more sustainable solution is a change well worth making.

Recommended Reading:

- *The Toxic Toothpaste Ingredients That You Need To Avoid For Good Oral Health*
- *How to Use Vinegar and Baking Soda to Clean Your Home*
- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *How to Detoxify and Heal the Lymphatic System*
- *Holistic Guide to Healing the Endocrine System and Balancing Our Hormones*

Sources:

- *The Inside Story: A Guide to Indoor Air Quality* – Consumer Product Safety Commission
  Introduction to Indoor Air Quality – EPA

- *Detergents occurring in freshwater* – Lenntech
- *Ingredient Watch List: Polysorbate 20—It May Be Contaminated with Carcinogenic 1,4-Dioxane* – Annmarie
- *Ingredient Watch List: Quats, the Preservatives that May Release Formaldehyde and Exacerbate Asthma* – Annmarie