

Have you ever wondered if the traditional cleaning products you use are safe for the environment? How about all of the new products entering the market that claim to be “green” or “natural,” or claim to be made from “all natural ingredients?” To help consumers looking for environmentally friendly cleaners, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a program that establishes requirements for “green” cleaning products. Known as the [Design for the Environment \(DfE\) Formulator Program](#), this program helps consumers identify which companies are producing sustainable products that are truly safer for the environment as well as human health.

Companies whose products are determined to meet the requirements of this program earn the right to display the DfE logo on the product's label. When you see this logo on a product, it means that the product lines up on the “green” end of the health and environmental spectrum without sacrificing product performance. It also means that each ingredient has been screened for potential human health and environmental effects and that, based on currently available health and safety data, the product contains only those ingredients that pose the least concern among chemicals in their class.

### **Other Cleaning Options**

For many cleaning tasks, a simple mixture of vinegar or baking soda in hot water can be used. Washing walls with a solution of hot water and vinegar helps freshen a room and neutralize odors. It also works well to clean windows and to dissolve dirt and grease on kitchen cabinets. Baking soda is another product that can be used not only to help adsorb odors around the house, but also to help clean areas such as bathtubs that you don't want to scratch. However, neither of these options should be used in place of disinfectants in areas where bacteria can grow, such as counters and sinks.

Surfaces such as kitchen counters that need to be disinfected should instead be washed with a mild detergent mixed with water. After rinsing with clean water, disinfect the surface with a mild bleach-based solution (1 cap of household bleach to a gallon of hot water) or other disinfecting agent as recommended by the surface manufacturer. Try to avoid using bleach products that contain added fragrances or other added ingredients.

### **More Cleaning and Disposal Tips**

When cleaning a kitchen, start in the main food preparation area and work your way outward into the rest of the room from the top down. This will help you avoid tracking dirt and germs back into your main food handling areas. Bathrooms should be cleaned from the top down, ending at the toilet.

Set aside any old paints, lawn care products, pharmaceuticals or other products you came across while cleaning that you no longer need. If you aren't sure what to do with them, contact your community or waste hauling provider for instructions on proper disposal. Never dispose of potentially hazardous products with the regular trash, or by flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down the drain. Anything you put down the drain could end up in your drinking water. You can also check to see if your community sponsors any events where hazardous wastes and other household items can be dropped off for disposal or recycling.

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TIP: New brands of “green” products continue to enter the market. Let [NSF International](#) help sort out the confusion.