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### Nature comes clean

**More people choosing products with nontoxic ingredients, fewer chemicals**

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More people are turning up their noses at lavender, lemon and lilac.

"I don't want my dishes and clothes to smell like oranges," said Susan Moss of Clintonville. "I prefer unscented things."

Moss is among a growing number of people who are turning to commercial and homemade cleaning concoctions they think are less harmful to themselves and the environment.

For Moss, the choice is a matter of preference. She doesn't like the artificial scents added to laundry and dish detergents. She wants to help keep sodium lauryl sulfate, phosphates and other detergent ingredients out of rivers and streams. She wants containers to be made from recycled materials that can be recycled again.

"I want products that have not been tested on animals. That's really big with me," she said.

She finds such products with brand names including Planet, Bi-O-Kleen and Seventh Generation -- at alternative grocers such as Wild Oats, Sunflower Natural Foods and the Clintonville Community Market.

Natural products typically claim to be nontoxic concoctions without chlorine bleach, ammonia or petroleum-based chemicals. They usually are biodegradable as well as perfume- and dye-free. Their vegetable-based ingredients are derived from coconut, grapefruit seeds, aloe, orange peels, salt and corn.

The niche of environmentally friendly cleaners has been shining in an otherwise lackluster market for household cleaners, according to a market report by Packaged Facts, the publishing division of MarketResearch.com.

Sales of natural laundry detergents and other household cleaners more than doubled between 2000 and 2004. In 2004, natural cleaner sales totaled \$290 million for a 7.3 percent share of the market.

Sales for all household cleaners fell 1.1 percent during the same period and is expected to drop another 1.1 percent by 2009 -- mainly because people have less time to clean and eat out more often.

"A positive note in the industry has been the proliferation of nontoxic eco-friendly products," the study noted. "Conventional disinfectant liquids and powders contain harmful and nonbiodegradable chemicals like lye, chlorine and ammonia, which are harmful for users and the environment."

A fourth of new cleaning products launched in 2004 were in the "natural" category, the study reported.

For some consumers, the nontoxic cleaners are a necessity.

Zoe Buyalos avoids using chlorine bleach, ammonia, commercial window sprays and most mainstream cleansers in her home-cleaning business, Organic Cleaning.

"When I do use chemical products, I get headaches," the Victorian Village woman said. "Some of the odors and fumes are overpowering and intense. They cause me some skin problems."

Buyalos uses a few soaps and detergents purchased at natural-foods stores. Most of her solutions, however, are made of vinegar or baking soda. She sometimes adds essential oils for their cleansing power or for customers who want some aromatherapy along with their washed windows and scrubbed bathtubs.

"Baking soda is a good abrasive for scouring tubs and kitchen sinks and the inside of the oven," she said. "Vinegar is antifungal. A lot of these things are your grandmother's way of doing things."

Buyalos said that about half of her customers in Clintonville, Westerville, Victorian Village and Upper Arlington want natural cleaners used in their homes.

The other customers don't care what Buyalos uses.

"They just want their houses to be clean," she said. "I definitely notice the difference. Physically and environmentally, it is so much better."

Some cleaning products can trigger headaches, fatigue, nausea and allergy symptoms, said Dr. Glen Aukerman, medical director of the Center of Integrative Medicine at Ohio State University.

Often, however, another cause -- such as the person's diet -- might be at the root of symptoms triggered by a household cleaner, Aukerman said.

He said he frequently fields questions from across the country about long-term health risks of specific products or the chemicals in them. For answers, he turns to the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, which have research information on their Web sites.

Aukerman said he seldom finds any red flags indicating health risks beyond those that are listed on the products. Labels typically note dangers of breathing the fumes, ingesting the products, or allowing them to touch the eyes or skin.

"By the same token, there is not a lot of evidence that the products being promoted as natural are, in fact, any safer," he said. "Just because it is an herbal solution does not guarantee that it is safe to inhale."

The field of natural cleansers has not been the subject of many scientific studies, he said.

Many natural products also carry warnings that the cleaners can irritate eyes and shouldn't be ingested.

Author Annie B. Bond has been a close observer of the movement toward natural cleaners.

"In 1980, I got very sick after being overexposed to pesticides. I needed a nontoxic home. At that time, there were very few products on the market you could buy to do these things."

Today, a host of good products is available. Although a few might not be as environmentally friendly as they claim, most are excellent, she said.

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Caption:

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Zoe Buyalos mixes her own natural cleaning solutions for her housecleaning service, Organic Cleaning.Photo

Memo:

\* For more information on cleaning products, visit [www.niehs.nih.gov](http://www.niehs.nih.gov). Choose "Environmental Health Info" on the left side of the page. Click "Alphabetical Listings" and select "H" for household products. S Visit the National Library of Medicine's database of household products and chemicals at [householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/products.htm](http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/products.htm).

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