

Safer Solutions for Your Home



Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Drain Openers, and Oven Cleaners

Hazard

Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Drain Openers, and Oven Cleaners are among the most dangerous household products. They often contain acids or bases that can blind you in seconds, or kill you if swallowed. The products corrode pipes and fixtures, leading to expensive plumbing repairs.

Safe Solutions

Toilet Bowl Cleaners – Detergent-type products work well for routine toilet cleaning. Acids are only needed if you have to remove hard water deposits or rust stains. If that is your situation, consider using a cleaner that contains citric acid, or try using a pumice stone occasionally (Note: heavy use of pumice can abrade the toilet's finish).



Drain Openers – The best approach is to prevent blockages from occurring by placing cleanable screens over each drain opening, and by adding an enzyme or bacteria powder to the drains once a month. Slow-running drains can be treated with enzyme-based drain openers.

For completely blocked drains, use a wire “snake,” disassemble and clean the trap, or carefully pour boiling hot water from a tea kettle down the clogged drain. Don’t try any of these remedies if you’ve already used a chemical drain opener on the clog and the drain is still stopped up—in that case, call a plumber for assistance.



Oven Cleaners – You can avoid the need for dangerous oven cleaners by placing pans or aluminum foil in the base of your oven to catch drips. If grease or smoke deposits do form in the oven, take a safer approach to removing them. Use a mild degreasing product, such as one containing d-limonene or a plant-based solvent. Milder products may take longer to work effectively, so plan your cleaning job accordingly.

Glass Cleaners

Hazard

Glass cleaners often contain toxic ingredients that can easily be absorbed through your skin or inhaled. One common ingredient—butoxyethanol (also called ethylene glycol butyl ether)—can harm your blood, liver, and kidneys, and can poison an unborn child. Since most of the cleaner evaporates from the glass or from your cleaning cloth, using these products can pollute the air in your home.

Safe Solution

Safer glass cleaners will be labeled “vinegar-based” or “low-ammonia” cleaners.



There are many effective household products on the market that are much safer than their hazardous competitors.

Pesticides

Hazard

Pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides and disinfectants, are poisons. Besides killing bugs and weeds, they may also poison children or pets, irritate eyes or skin, cause cancer, or kill birds and fish.

Safer Solution

Traps, baits, physical barriers, soaps and oils, biological controls (“good” bugs that eat “bad” bugs), and good housekeeping and gardening practices are the safest ways to control pests. It is impossible to keep all pests away from our homes and yards—but there are convenient ways to keep the pests from annoying us or interfering with our lives.

Soapy water cleans up many insects. Try using it in a spray bottle, on a sponge, or as a bath for a bug-infested plant.

Controlling ants:

Prevent access - Caulk cracks where ants are entering the house. Weather strip doors and windows (this will save energy too). When ants appear, follow their trails inside or outside your home and seal off entry points using tape, putty, or caulk.

Don't feed the pests - Store food in containers with tight-fitting lids or in the refrigerator. Put pet food dishes in a larger dish of soapy water. Empty trash each night.

Clean up the ants inside - Wipe up ant trails with soapy water. Vacuuming ants works well too.

Use baits to wipe out the nest - The ants in your home represent just the tip of the iceberg. Use baits containing boric acid, borax, sulfuramid, avermectin, abamectin, or hydramethylnon to kill the nest and prevent recurring problems.



Controlling cockroaches:

Follow the tips above for ants, selecting cockroach baits with boric acid, abamectin, or hydramethylnon. Try sticky traps for small infestations. For larger invasions, follow precautions on the product labels, use insecticidal dusts like diatomaceous earth (don't use the pool filter product) or boric acid in wall voids, under large appliances, and in cracks and crevices before you seal them.

Controlling dandelions and other broadleaf weeds:

Skip the “weed and feed” products and try pulling the weeds, root and all. A weed puller (which costs only a few dollars) makes this job easier. If weeding isn’t your style, there are many other low-toxicity weed control products at your nursery.

Watering deeply and infrequently and using slow-release fertilizers will make your yard an unfriendly place for weeds. Keeping grass taller will shade out weeds. (Check with your nursery to find out the right mowing height for your grass.) Putting a thick layer of mulch around your plants will keep weeds from growing and conserve water.



Old releases of pesticides like DDT still make some fish risky to eat—In the past much of this came from industrial sources, but today most of it enters the waters from polluted urban runoff from our yards and gardens.

