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Green cleaning parties make do-it-yourself easy

Green cleaning parties make doing the right thing easy and fun

By [Kat Kerlin](#)

Hands reach across a table for vinegar, borax and lemon essential oil in a Northwest Reno backyard. Parmesan-like flakes of soap are grated into a measuring cup, and baking soda bubbles over in vinegar. Mason jars are given name tag labels: Hello! My Name Is All-Purpose Cleaner.

“What’s the olive oil for?” asks Christi Cakiroglu, gesturing to the industrial-sized tub on the table.

“That’s for the furniture polish,” replies Sonya Hem, host of this unconventional cooking party.

Everything on the table cost a total of about \$100, and it’s enough for 10 people to each make a batch of laundry detergent, creamy soft scrub, furniture polish, all-purpose cleaner and drain opener. Party-goers throw in \$5 or \$10 for supplies.

Hem discovered the Green Cleaning Party kit online and decided to hold a party in her home. The kit, offered through Women’s Voices for the Earth, comes with a video, recipes, labels and an informational booklet about throwing your own party. The simplicity of homemade cleaners and reduced chemicals appeals to Hem, who works for the Nevada Land Conservancy.

“A lot of these things are things our grandmothers used,” Hem says.



From left, Becky Stock grates soap for non-toxic laundry detergent with Christi Cakiroglu and Caity Rooney.
Photo By Kat Kerlin

For information on hosting your own Green Cleaning party, visit www.womenandenvironment.org

Recipe for all-purpose cleaner: Mix 2 cups white distilled vinegar with 2 cups water and 20-30 drops essential oil (optional).

According to the Green Cleaning Party booklet, conventional laundry detergent costs about 48 cents per load, whereas the homemade version is 13 cents per load. The homemade creamy soft scrub, which is used like Comet cleaner, costs 78 cents compared to \$3.69 for the same amount of the conventional stuff.

The group piles into Hem's house for the 5-10 minute video. It explains how popular, store-bought cleaners have been linked to asthma in cleaning employees and lower sperm counts, reduced fertility and lower birth weight in mice.

"And that's why I'm here," says Alison Gaulden, vice president of public affairs for Planned Parenthood. She's concerned about reports that link problems with women's reproductive health and widespread chemical use.

"It's kind of telling that all of the cleaning products are considered hazardous waste," says Cakiroglu, who works for Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful.

Ingredients are not listed on conventional store-bought products. The only way to know what's really in your cleaner is to make it yourself. So it's outside to the table full of cleaning ingredients, and the group gets to it. In less than an hour, eight people have made five different cleaners.

Julie Rexwinkel works for the state Department of Corrections, which has been discussing ways to cut the budget. She wonders if the cheaper, homemade cleaners could save them money if made available to its cleaning staff. Before this party, she says, "I hadn't even thought about the cleaning product thing."

Becky Stock, also of the Nevada Land Conservancy, says she'd been buying ready-made, all-natural cleaning products but was discouraged by their prices, which were higher than conventional products. She'd had recipes for natural cleaners for years but never got around to making them until this party.

"I had the information but never made the effort," she says. "She [Hem] made it so easy."

Hem had made her own glass cleaner a couple years ago and was impressed that it was so cheap. "Often, when you want to do something environmental, it costs more," she says. "Here, you can do the right thing, and it costs less."