

Keep Your Home Clean and Green

Cat cleanup can be thorough, as well as chemical-free.

By Lisa Hanks

“Clean your home in the most nontoxic way possible, and avoid chemicals that are known to be hazardous to your health, your cat’s health or your environment,” advises Jill Potvin Schoff of Wallingford, Conn., author of the book “Green Up Your Cleanup.”

Children and pets are more vulnerable to a toxic environment, and cats particularly are sensitive.

“Quite a few studies have shown that toxins have a more significant impact on children than they do on adults, and I think these studies can certainly be applied to pets,” says Schoff, who owns two cats: 12-year-old Whiskey and 4-year-old Seska.

Harsh household cleaners are a typical toxic culprit. Avoid petroleum-based ingredients and artificial fragrances, as well as labels that read, “danger,” “corrosive,” “poison” or other warnings.

“Bleach and ammonia are two of the most common cleaning chemicals that should really be avoided,” Schoff says. “A good rule of thumb is to listen to your nose. If something smells really, really strong, then it’s probably not something you should be using.”

Be careful of essential oils and products containing them, such as the citrus oil found in some furniture polish. Cats are extremely sensitive to essential oils.

“I make sure my cats are not in the room,” Schoff says. “It’s fine as long as the cats don’t come in immediate contact with it. Also ventilate the room and be sure everything’s dry before allowing the cats back in.”

For a good commercial green product, look for plant-based cleaners with natural ingredients and no phosphates, solvents, chlorine or artificial fragrances. For a homemade solution, vinegar is the perfect natural, nontoxic, all-around cleaner, thanks to its slight acidity.

“It’s actually a great disinfectant and is very effective at killing germs and viruses,” Schoff says. Use non-diluted vinegar for tough jobs, such as cleaning the litterbox, soap scum, hard water and problematic stains.

To create your own general purpose spray cleaner, pour white vinegar into a clean spray bottle and dilute it by half with water. Use it on almost any countertop or surface, including bathrooms and floors (except marble or granite).

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) is another effective, gentle cleaner, but don’t leave it anywhere your cat can sample it. Eating large amounts can lead to irregular electrolyte levels and possibly muscle spasms and heart issues. Vacuum or rinse immediately after use. Before using vinegar or baking soda, always test an inconspicuous area first to be sure it’s color-safe.

Baking soda neutralizes pH levels, which means it can eliminate strong smells. Sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge or cut a lemon in half and use as a cleaner or scouring powder.

To up the ante on a stain, apply a paste of baking soda and water, scrub, then spray it with vinegar. Baking soda reacts to acids, such as vinegar and lemon juice, releasing carbon dioxide. The resulting bubbles increase your cleaning power. Also, when cats repeatedly rub their scent glands on the furniture, they leave an oily spot that attracts dirt. Try the baking soda and water paste to get rid of those stains.

For vomit, urine and other stains, club soda or vinegar are must-have cleaners. Scrape what you can off of the surface, then gently blot up any liquid with towels — no scrubbing. Next, pour on the vinegar or club soda, and work it in slowly, using as little moisture as possible. Give it some time to work, and blot dry.

Give your home a good, green scrubbing, and you, your cats and your home will be sparkling happy and healthy.

Lisa Hanks is a freelance writer based in Newport Beach, Calif. As she writes each day, her three cats rotate lap duties to



be sure she is never catless.