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“Spring Cleaning by Greening”
By Callie Martin

If you don't have the chance to see the Russian ballet *The Rite of Spring*, be sure to see it happen in your home clean-up. Make your mop, broom, and sponge dance their very own rite of spring by greening your annual clean! Part One of the 1913 ballet by Vaslav Nijinsky opens with a scene called “Adoration of the Earth.” Begin your annual clean with a similar theme by using green cleaners and disposing of any toxic cleaners or household hazardous waste properly.

The dance begins in choosing cleaning products. It is important to consider both health and the environment. Antagonists to the adoration of the earth are cleaning products that are frequently involved in home poisonings. Most households have them, and they are too often kept within the reach of children. In addition, some cleaning products look and smell like food. Compare a Comet Cleanser with a can of Kraft Parmesan Cheese or lemon oil furniture polish. The large number of poisoning incidents involving cleaning products does not mean that these products are more toxic than other household products. It's just that they are more often accidentally swallowed. The particular ones to watch out for are the solvents, which are many times labeled as “DANGER. Harmful or fatal if swallowed.” Most solvent-based products are not cleaners, although they can be found in spot removers, dry cleaning fluids and some metal or furniture polishes. Most often they include gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid, oil-based paints and paint removers, and many automotive products contain solvents. If a solvent is swallowed it can be sucked into the lungs where it coats the lung surface to cause a pneumonia-like condition that can be fatal.

The fatality of a dance sometimes stems from a lack of attention by either audience or dancer. To avoid an accident in the home, it is critical to pay attention to the three most dangerous cleaning products in the average home. Drain cleaners, oven cleaners and acid-based toilet bowl cleaners. Most these cleaners are labeled “DANGER. Corrosive,” for an excellent reason. Corrosive products severely burn skin and eyes and if accidentally swallowed a corrosive product can cause internal burns. According to the Washington Toxics Coalition there is no reason to have corrosive products in the home, because safer alternatives exist for all of them.

Just as the movements tell the story in a Russian ballet, so can yours in the celebratory mixing of green cleaning recipes and the removal of toxic products from your cupboards. Your cleaning choreography can be on that tells a tale of spring renewal: staging your home with a backdrop that's less of a “toxic clean” and more of a “healthy green.” Greening your clean can be an art form in which to take pleasure. Here are some recipes to get you started:

Drain Cleaner

½ cup baking soda
½ cup vinegar
Kettle of boiling water

This recipe will free minor clogs and is a great preventative medicine for your drains. Pour the baking soda down the drain first, then the vinegar, Let it bubble for a few minutes. Then follow the fizzle with your kettle of boiling water. If the clog is stubborn, repeat or use a mechanical snake. Install drain screens to prevent future clogs.

Toilet Bowl Cleaner

Baking soda
Liquid soap
Vinegar

Don't bother with strong disinfectants or acids. Use a non-chlorinated scouring power like Borax, Bon Ami or baking soda and liquid soap to clean the toilet bowl thoroughly and often.

You can also mix lemon juice in with your non-chlorinated scouring powder to make a bleaching paste. With a pair of rubber gloves smear the paste onto the sides of the bowl, wait two hours and scrub and rinse with the toilet brush. Sparkly clean and lemon fresh!

Oven Cleaner

Baking soda
Razor blade
Copper scouring pad

Make a paste of baking soda and water, apply to oven surfaces, and let stand for at least 30 minutes. Mechanical action is the key. Use a copper scouring pad for most surfaces. A razor blade is effective to get under large food deposits. Prevent future spills by placing a pan or foil under casseroles or pies or use a self-cleaning oven.

In recent years there has been a trend towards purchasing green cleaners. Remember the production of any product places a burden on the environment. The best products are those that are least damaging to both you and the Earth. However, if buying green cleaning products suits you best, be skeptical when shopping. Look for products with specific claims rather than general. For example "90% biodegraded in 3 days" is much more specific than just "biodegradable." Also, look for contradictory claims. If the product says "non-toxic" on one side and "vapors harmful" on the other someone is being dishonest and it's not you.

Lastly, as the curtain to your home's *The Rite of Spring Cleaning* closes, ponder this last scene. Is there such thing as a non-toxic cleaner? Any chemical is toxic to you depending on the quantity ingested and your rate of exposure. However, the government has set benchmarks for toxicity and according to the Poison Center a product is generally considered non toxic if the lethal dose is greater than 5 grams per kilogram of bodyweight. That works out to about 2 ounces for a 25 lb child or 12 ounces (3/4 pound)

for a 150 lb adult. The reason to keep household cleaners “green” and out of reach of children presents its finale here. 2 ounces is not very much at all.

If you need to dispose of any toxic household hazardous waste or cleaners this spring make sure you do so properly by taking them to the Skagit County Household Hazardous Waste Collection Center located at 14104 Ovenell Road and open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Skagit County residents are not charged for their drop-offs.