

Alternative Product Use Fact Sheet



Many commonly used household substances are toxic or include chemicals harmful to the environment and human health. The use of alternative products instead of toxic substances drastically reduces the presence of toxics in stormwater and receiving waters and improves the overall water quality of our community. Common toxic substances found in the home are cleaners, automotive products, and pesticides, fertilizers, paints, and fuels. This fact sheet provides homeowners awareness to safer, less-toxic product alternatives to substitute for common household chemicals. For additional information visit the [EPA's Stormwater BMP: Alternative Product Use](#).

Alternative Products – What to Buy

Whenever possible, buy products that are free of toxic chemicals. Lots of alternative products have been developed and are readily available in your supermarket in growing in response to customer demand.



- ✓ When purchasing products, take a minute to carefully read the label. Look for products that appear to disclose all their ingredients. "Signal words" will help you spot ingredients that are harmful: **caution, warning, danger, and poison** ("caution" is least hazardous and "danger" is most hazardous; extremely toxic products must also include the word "poison."). Choose the least-hazardous product to do the job.

Highest hazard	DANGER, POISON	→	POISON DANGEROUS OR FATAL IF SWALLOWED OR INHALED CAUSES SEVERE BURNS TO EYES AND SKIN
Less hazardous	CAUTION, WARNING	→	WARNING: EYE IRRITANT
Safer	You don't see: DANGER, POISON CAUTION or WARNING	→	MULTI-PURPOSE CLEANER

- ✓ Before you use a product, carefully read the directions and follow the instructions. Be sure to use the correct amount of a product. Remember, you won't get twice the results by using twice as much.
- ✓ Select products (cleaners, shampoos, etc.) made from plant-based materials, such as oils made from citrus, seed, vegetable or pine. By doing so, you are selecting products that are biodegradable and generally less toxic. These products also provide the additional benefit of being made from renewable resources. Ask for plant-based products at your local grocery or retail store.
- ✓ Choose pump spray containers instead of aerosols. Pressurized aerosol products often produce a finer mist that is more easily inhaled. Aerosols also put unnecessary volatile organic chemicals into your indoor air when you use them.
- ✓ Ask for unbleached paper products or products bleached with hydrogen peroxide or oxygen, which produce less pollution during papermaking.

Keywords When Shopping for Non-Toxic Alternative Products

- ✚ Biodegradable
- ✚ Non-Toxic
- ✚ Derived from plants and minerals
- ✚ Does not contain petroleum-derived ingredients or petrochemicals

*Make sure the products are labeled accurately with all ingredients.

Around the House

Single-ingredient, common household materials such as baking soda, vinegar, or plant-based soaps and detergents can often do the job on your carpet or other surfaces. Soap and water has been shown to keep surfaces as free of bacteria as antibacterial soaps do. If your carpet needs professional cleaning, enlist a carpet service that uses less-toxic cleaners that are low in VOCs and irritants.



- ✓ Purchase a mercury-free fever thermometer. Many effective alternatives are on the shelves at your local pharmacy. Broken mercury fever thermometers can be a source of toxic mercury levels in your home and discarded products containing mercury contribute to higher levels in the environment. Contact [Sanitation Department](#) or [NPDES Stormwater Program](#) for guidance on old thermometer disposal .
- ✓ Baking soda works well to clean sinks, tubs and toilets, and it freshens drains as well.
- ✓ Use vinegar and water in a pump spray bottle for cleaning mirrors and shining chrome. Vinegar or soap and water with drying rags or a squeegee also work well for cleaning windows.
- ✓ Use reusable unbleached cotton towels, rags, and non-scratch scrubbing sponges for all-purpose cleaning instead of bleached disposable paper products.
- ✓ Use dishwasher detergents that are free of chlorine bleach and lowest in phosphates.
- ✓ Use bathroom cleaners that are free of aerosol propellants and antibacterial agents.
- ✓ Instead of more complicated detergents, try using a combination of washing soda and borax in your machine. These are usually as effective as more complex formulas and are also usually cheaper.
- ✓ Avoid bleach when possible. If whitening is needed, use non-chlorine bleach, which is oxygen based and often highly effective.

Reducing toxics in the yard

- ✓ Mowing your grass to a height of about **3½ inches** is the most important thing you can do to improve the health of your lawn. By keeping grass length longer, the roots grow deeper and can reach more water during dry periods. Longer grass also creates shade, making it harder for weeds to get established.
- ✓ If you use a lawn service, consider a service provider that uses less-toxic alternatives.



- ✓ Test the soil to see what your soil needs. Apply only as much fertilizer as is needed. Soil test kits can be purchased at a lawn and garden store or through Escambia County Extension Office: <http://escambia.ifas.ufl.edu/lng/>.
- ✓ If your grass grows in heavy clay soil, aeration can be very beneficial. Aeration decreases compaction and allows air and water to get to the roots.
- ✓ Weeds such as dandelions can be removed easily by digging them up with a fishtail weeder when the soil is damp to avoid use of chemical products.
- ✓ Top dressing your lawn with a compost-soil mix will reduce your lawn's water needs and make it more resistant to drought and disease. You will need to fertilize less often, and when you do, you can use less fertilizer.
- ✓ Consider replacing parts of your yard with native perennials that lower maintenance and lessen the need for water and chemicals.
- ✓ Ask at your garden store for less-toxic alternatives to chemical pesticides to control pests.



Learn more about Florida Friendly Landscaping at Escambia County IFAS:
<http://escambia.ifas.ufl.edu/ffl/>

Thank you for helping us to make your home, neighborhood and city a cleaner and better place to live. For more information or service needs contact the City of Pensacola's [Sanitation Department](#) or [NPDES Stormwater Program](#).