

APRIL 2009

family f.y.i.

Natural Cleaning Product?

By Robin Murphy

The term “natural” has become a popular label on many types of products, from foods to cosmetics to household cleaners. You may be surprised to learn that “natural” does not have a standard definition, so it can mean different things to different companies.

In general, natural cleaning products may contain ingredients that are sustainable, biodegradable, non-toxic and hypoallergenic and have not been tested on animals. A natural ingredient is not necessarily harmless. For example, some plant-derived compounds are toxic and have negative health effects.

Here are a few tips when shopping for cleaners:

- **Look for Green.** Green generally means that a product contains environmentally-friendly ingredients and avoids those that are chemically-reactive or toxic. In New York State, green cleaning products that are used in schools cannot have an adverse impact on the health of children and the environment, and must be certified by either Green Seal or Environmental Choice, two nonprofit organizations. Green Seal currently is working on revising its standards for ingredients that may trigger asthma and cause other reactions in vulnerable groups such as children and janitorial workers.

- **Seek Out Key Ingredients.** Natural cleaners usually contain a combination of essential oils like pine, tea tree, thyme, limonene, or mint; glycerine, a lubricant and moisturizer; a plant-based cleaning agent; an alcohol; and safe coloring agents.

- **Raid the Cupboard.** Many households already have effective natural cleaning products in their kitchen and bathroom. Lemon juice, Borax, vinegar, salt, mineral oil and baking soda are highly effective for a variety of household cleaning chores.

- **Shop Wisely.** Look for cleaners that carry a Green Seal or EcoLogo. Visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Web site at www.epa.gov/epp/index.htm for information on environmentally preferable products. The National Institutes of Health Household Products Database, <http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/products.htm>, also is a resource.

- **Heed Warnings.** Avoid buying products that have “danger” or “warning” statements on the label.

Robin Murphy is president of Maid Brigade, the Green Clean Certified™ maid service. 888-525-6243. www.maidbrigade.com.

