



## Extraordinary Uses for Ordinary Items

by Katie O'Sullivan

How many different chemicals do you have under your kitchen sink? It seems like there's a specific cleanser for every different type of dirt. What did our grandmothers do before the invention of these thousand different "wonder" sprays?

They used vinegar.

Vinegar has been around for thousands of years, and is one of the earliest cleansers and disinfectants known to us. Traces of it have been found in Egyptian urns dating from 3000 BC.

Vinegar is also all-natural, environmentally safe and friendly, and economical to buy in bulk. A gallon of white distilled vinegar costs less than a few ounces of other cleaning products, and has so many uses. We've listed just a few to get you started – feel free to share your ideas with us!

### SPRING CLEANING IN THE IN THE KITCHEN AND BATHROOMS:

**Clean the microwave** by mixing 1/2 cup white distilled vinegar and 1/2 cup water in a microwave-safe bowl. Bring it to a rolling boil inside the microwave. Baked-on food will be loosened, and odors will disappear. Wipe clean.

**Clean the shelves and walls of the refrigerator** with a half-and-half solution of water and white distilled vinegar.

**Cut the grime on the top of the fridge and on top of your ceiling fan** with a paper towel or cloth and full-strength white distilled vinegar.

**Remove mineral deposits from coffee makers.** Fill the water reservoir with 1 cup or more of white distilled vinegar and run it through a whole cycle. Run it once or twice more with plain water to rinse clean. (Check the owners' manual first.)

**Remove stains from coffee and teacups** by scrubbing them gently with equal parts of salt (or baking soda) and white distilled vinegar. Rinse clean.

**Get rid of mildew, dust, and stale odors** by wiping down walls with undiluted white distilled vinegar on a cloth or a sponge mop.

**Clean bathroom grout** with a paste with baking soda and white distilled vinegar.

### USING VINEGAR TO HELP WITH PETS, PESTS, AND GARDENS:

**Stop a cat from scratching** by spraying white distilled vinegar on furniture. (Test the fabric for color-fastness first!)

**Keep a dog from scratching her ears** by wiping them out regularly with a soft cloth or cotton ball dipped in undiluted white distilled vinegar.

**Get rid of fruit flies** by setting out a small dish of undiluted white distilled vinegar.

**Stop insect stings and bites from itching** by dabbing them with a cotton ball saturated with undiluted white distilled vinegar.

**Find relief from jellyfish stings** by dotting the irritation with vinegar to relieve itching.

**Discourage cats from getting into the kids' sandbox** by spraying sand with white distilled vinegar.

**Clean a hummingbird feeder with white distilled vinegar—soap or detergent** can leave behind residue that is harmful to these delicate birds.

**Kill garden slugs** by spraying them with a mixture of 1 part water and 1 part white distilled vinegar.

**Give acid-loving plants like azaleas, rhododendrons, hydrangeas and gardenias a little help** by watering them with a white distilled vinegar solution every few weeks. Mix one cup of white distilled vinegar to a gallon of tap water.

**Keep rabbits from eating your plants.** Put cotton balls soaked in white distilled vinegar in a 35mm film container. Poke a hole in the top and place in the garden.

**Preserve cut flowers and liven droopy ones** by adding 2 tablespoons white distilled vinegar and 1 teaspoon sugar to a quart of water in a vase.

**Remove berry stains on your hands** by rubbing them with white distilled vinegar.

**Remove skunk odors with white distilled vinegar in one of two ways:** Either wipe down the animal with a 50-50 solution of white distilled vinegar and water, followed by a plain-water rinse. If that doesn't get rid of the smell, try mixing 1 quart of vinegar with ½ cup baking soda and 1-2 teaspoons of mild dish soap. Wipe animal down with mixture and rinse with plain water.

Did you know that people also use vinegar to soothe both sore throats and sunburn, stop athlete's foot, get rid of their hiccups, and make dandruff disappear?

My favorite use for vinegar that I found while researching this versatile liquid is that it's the secret cooking ingredient at most Southern picnics. Not only is there vinegar in every good barbeque sauce, but it's also used in those Jello Mold Salads to keep them from sagging in the heat! Add one teaspoon of vinegar for every box of gelatin used, and your Ambrosia Salad will last just as long as any Southern Lady's. Or longer, if her Grandmama didn't share the secret.

Katie O'Sullivan lives in Harwich with her family.

In addition to editing this magazine, she works as a freelance editor and writes contemporary fiction. Although she did hands-on research while writing this article, her house has now returned to its usual chaotic state and is in desperate need of a visit by a fairy godmother with a mop and feather duster.