

CLEAN AND GREEN

Natural products help keep homes safe

By **MELISSA S. MONROE**
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SAN ANTONIO — Cleaning with bleach and ammonia is a thing of the past. Moms are starting to go back to good old vinegar and baking soda to bring back the sparkle.

For Esther Foster, going green has been a gradual process. The wake-up call came four years ago when the family cat, Sunshine, nearly died from drinking out of the toilet bowl that had just been doused with a harsh cleaner.

"If you can't breathe when you spray some of these cleaners then obviously they can't be good for you," says the San Antonio mother of two. "And for pets, it must be even more toxic since they are lower to the ground and smell the cleaners and lick their paws."

Buying environmentally friendly cleaning products for your home and children has become a hot new trend as "going green" has been embraced by the government, companies and cities across the United States. It's also an explosive industry with many corporations jumping on the green bandwagon and major stores including Target, H-E-B supermarkets and Whole Foods carrying a variety of these brands.

While longtime green companies such as Seventh Generation, Method and Simple Green have won over many moms, other big players have been introducing safer products.

SC Johnson now has Nature's Source and Clorox has Green Works. But Ms. Foster has implemented her own tech-savvy methods to make sure she is truly getting a green product. She downloaded The Label Reading Guide, a free app, onto her iPhone so she can plug in unknown ingredients from labels.

Many products, she added, have gone back on the grocery shelf after finding out she was about to purchase something toxic.

Moms Tamar Rosenthal and Dana Rubenstein were also having a hard time figuring out what green

products were totally safe for their kids. They combined their business savvy and created **Dapple**, a line of child-safe cleaning products made only from ingredients found in nature.

The products, which include dish soap, dish powder, toy spray cleaner and toy cleaner wipes are sold online and at Toys R Us, Babies R Us and H-E-B.

The mom entrepreneurs have even come out with travel wipes to clean toys and a 3-ounce bottle of liquid soap so mommies can clean on the fly.

Hesma Stephens, who lives just west of Houston, also has been more adamant about using green products like Melaleuca and Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day. Her 10-year-old son has autism and her 2-year-old daughter likes to help her clean.

She says that since reducing toxins in her house her son has had fewer rashes.

"By using green products, you don't have to worry about adverse affects or running to go open a window because the smell is so strong," said Ms. Stephens, who operates the See How to Play day-care center for autistic kids in Richmond, Texas.

She added that while many green products can be more expensive, buying the concentrated forms can make your dollar stretch further.

Just looking at the warning labels on many household cleaning products should serve as a red flag for parents, and be enough for them to leave it on the shelf, says Dr. Alan Greene, author of "Raising Baby Green: The Earth-Friendly Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Baby Care" (Jossey-Bass, \$16.95).

"The key thing parents were told by many pediatricians is to lock up cleaning supplies. However, as good as this advice is, there are still a couple of thousand accidents every year," says Dr. Greene, a noted pediatrician who has worked with Seventh Generation on several projects.

HELPFUL GREEN WEBSITES

www.seventhgeneration.com: for a label-reading guide and downloadable application for iPhones. Also has informational blog site.

www.methodhome.com: blog site.

www.care2.com: largest online community for healthy and green living.

