Cleaning Supplies Every Home Needs

A small, well-chosen kit that covers every room — no cupboard overflowing with sprays and gadgets.

The Core Five Cleaners

These five handle roughly 95% of everyday household cleaning. If you buy nothing else, buy these.

1. Dish soap (mild liquid)

- **Use for:** Washing dishes by hand, wiping kitchen counters, cleaning sinks, spot-cleaning fabrics, and washing most washable surfaces when diluted (about 1 teaspoon per 4 litres of warm water).
- **NOT for:** Laundry machines (it foams too much), floors in large quantities (it leaves a sticky film if not rinsed well), or anything that must stay grease-free for painting or sealing.

2. Distilled white vinegar (5%)

- **Use for:** Descaling kettles and showerheads, cutting limescale on taps, cleaning glass and mirrors (diluted 1:1 with water), and freshening the washing machine (1 cup in an empty hot cycle).
- **NOT for:** Natural stone (marble, granite, travertine), waxed wood, cast iron, or aluminium — vinegar's acid etches stone, strips wax, and corrodes metal. Never mix vinegar with bleach or hydrogen peroxide in the same bottle or solution.

3. Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda)

- **Use for:** Gentle scouring of sinks, tubs, and cooktops (as a paste: 3 tablespoons baking soda + 1 tablespoon water), deodorising fridges, carpets, and bins, and freshening laundry (1/2 cup in the drum).
- **NOT for:** A substitute for a disinfectant — baking soda cleans and deodorises but does not reliably kill germs. Do not pour it into a spray bottle with vinegar and expect a miracle cleaner; the fizz is mostly theatre, and the two neutralise each other.

4. An all-purpose cleaner

- **Use for:** Daily wipe-downs of counters, tables, appliance exteriors, and bathroom surfaces. A store-bought all-purpose spray is convenient; a homemade mix of 1 part vinegar to 1 part water with a few drops of dish soap works for most homes.
- **NOT for:** Disinfecting after illness or raw-meat contact (use a proper disinfectant for that), or for stone and waxed surfaces if it is vinegar-based.

5. A disinfectant

- **Use for:** Toilet seats and handles, kitchen surfaces after raw meat, door handles and light switches during illness, and bin interiors. Check the label for its contact time — most need to stay wet on the surface for 3–10 minutes to work.
- **NOT for:** Everyday wiping of every surface — overusing disinfectant wastes money, damages some finishes, and builds chemical residue. Clean first, then disinfect only where it matters.

Optional extras (nice, not essential): a bathroom-specific limescale remover for hard-water areas, an oven cleaner for heavy grease (or a baking-soda paste left overnight), and a wood cleaner or oil soap for real-wood furniture. Buy these only if your home actually needs them.

The Tools: What Actually Gets Used

- **Microfibre cloths (at least 6–8):** The workhorse of the whole kit. Use them damp for dusting, wiping, and polishing. Keep separate cloths for kitchen, bathroom, and glass to avoid cross-contamination — colour-coding helps. Wash them in the machine without fabric softener, which coats the fibres and ruins their absorbency.
- **A non-scratch scrub sponge:** For sinks, tubs, and cooktops. Avoid steel wool on non-stick, glass, and acrylic.
- **An old toothbrush:** Perfect for grout lines, tap bases, and around fixtures.
- **Paper towels:** For the genuinely grim jobs (pet accidents, raw-meat spills) where you want to throw the mess away, not wash it into your cloths.
- **A toilet brush with a holder:** Non-negotiable — replace the brush head every 6 months.
- **A broom and dustpan:** For hard floors, daily crumbs, and sweeping before mopping.
- **A mop:** A flat microfibre mop for hard floors is enough for most homes; a spin mop is better for large tiled areas. Never use a steam mop on laminate or unsealed wood — the moisture swells the boards.
- **A vacuum cleaner:** With attachments for upholstery, stairs, and edges. A stick vacuum suits small homes; a bagged or bagless upright suits larger ones with carpets. Empty or replace the filter as the manual says — a clogged vacuum just pushes dust around.
- **Two spray bottles:** One for your all-purpose mix, one for plain water. Label both clearly.
- **A squeegee:** For shower glass and windows — 30 seconds after a shower prevents most water marks.
- **Rubber gloves (2 pairs):** One pair for the bathroom, one for the kitchen.
- **A bucket, a dustpan brush, and a lint roller:** Small, cheap, and used constantly.

Safety Gear: The Part People Skip

- **Rubber gloves** — wear them for every job involving chemicals, toilets, bins, or mould.
- **Safety glasses** for overhead jobs (ceiling fans, high shelves) and for spraying oven cleaner or bleach.
- **A dust mask or N95 respirator** for dusty jobs (attics, ceiling fans, mouldy grout, sanding). A paper dust mask is fine for dust; use an N95 for mould.
- **First aid basics:** If a cleaner splashes in your eyes, rinse with clean water for at least 15 minutes and seek medical advice if irritation persists. If swallowed, do not induce vomiting — call your local poison centre and keep the product label handy.

Storage: Keep It Safe, Dry, and Findable

- **One caddy, one cupboard.** Keep daily supplies in a portable caddy and bulk stock in a single cupboard — ideally high, dry, and away from food.
- **Up high, locked if needed.** All chemicals go on a high shelf or in a cupboard with a child-proof latch if children or pets live in (or visit) the home. Never store cleaners under the kitchen sink without a latch — it is the first place a curious toddler reaches.
- **Original containers, original labels.** Never decant cleaners into food or drink bottles. If you make a homemade mix, label the bottle with its contents and the date you made it, and replace vinegar-based mixes within a month.
- **Cool, dry, and upright.** Heat and damp degrade cleaners and can warp containers. Keep them away from radiators, boilers, and damp basements.
- **Check expiry and condition.** Bleach loses strength after about 6 months once opened; aerosol cans dent and leak; cracked bottles go in the bin (rinsed, with the cap on, per local disposal rules).

Budget vs Premium: Where to Spend and Where to Save

- **Save on:** Dish soap, vinegar, baking soda, microfibre cloths, spray bottles, and buckets. Store brands and bulk packs perform identically to premium versions for these.
- **Spend on:** A good vacuum cleaner (the single most-used cleaning tool in the house), a sturdy mop, and quality rubber gloves that do not split after two uses.
- **Middle ground:** All-purpose cleaners and disinfectants. A mid-range product with clear labelling and a stated contact time beats both the cheapest mystery spray and the most expensive “eco-luxury” bottle.

What to Skip

- Single-use floor wipes for every room when a washable microfibre mop does the same job cheaper and with less waste.
- A different spray for every surface (one for glass, one for wood, one for granite, one for stainless steel) — unless you genuinely have all those surfaces, the core five cleaners above cover nearly everything.
- Expensive “miracle” gadgets (electric spin scrubbers, UV sanitisers, robot mops) before you own the basics. A robot mop is a luxury, not a replacement for a broom and a mop.
- Duplicates: two half-empty bottles of the same cleaner, three toilet brushes, or a drawer of cloths you never wash. Use one up before opening the next.
- Scented everything: plug-ins, beads, and heavily fragranced sprays mask odours instead of removing them. Clean the source of the smell, then ventilate — fresh air is free.

What NOT to Do

- **Never mix bleach with vinegar, ammonia, or any other cleaner.** Bleach + vinegar creates chlorine gas; bleach + ammonia creates chloramine gas. Both can cause serious breathing injuries. Use one product at a time and rinse between steps.
- **Never mix hydrogen peroxide with vinegar** in the same bottle or solution — it forms peracetic acid, which irritates skin, eyes, and lungs.
- **Never store cleaners in food or drink containers** — a child, guest, or tired adult can mistake them in seconds.
- **Never use a cleaner on a surface it warns against** — check the label for stone, wood, and electronics warnings before you spray.
- **Never skip gloves** for toilets, bins, mould, or bleach — skin contact causes irritation, and cuts become infection risks.
- **Never spray cleaners directly onto electronics, walls, or into the air** — spray onto a cloth instead, and ventilate the room.
- **Never leave a damp mop, cloth, or sponge sitting in a bucket** — they breed mildew and smell within a day. Rinse, wring, and air-dry them after every use.
- **Never buy in bulk what you have not tried** — a gallon of a cleaner you hate is a gallon of clutter.

Tick-Off Checklist

Tick each item as you stock it, then re-check the safety items every few months.

- [ ] Dish soap (mild liquid) stocked — for dishes, counters, sinks, and spot-cleaning
- [ ] Distilled white vinegar (5%) stocked — for limescale, glass, and descaling (never on stone, waxed wood, cast iron, or aluminium)

- [ ] Baking soda stocked — for gentle scouring and deodorising (not a disinfectant)
- [ ] All-purpose cleaner stocked — for daily wipe-downs (not a substitute for disinfectant after illness or raw meat)
- [ ] Disinfectant stocked — used only where it matters, left wet for its stated contact time
- [ ] Microfibre cloths (6–8) ready, colour-coded by room, washed without fabric softener
- [ ] Non-scratch scrub sponge and old toothbrush ready for sinks, tubs, and grout
- [ ] Toilet brush with holder in place (head replaced every 6 months)
- [ ] Broom, dustpan, and mop ready (no steam mop on laminate or unsealed wood)
- [ ] Vacuum cleaner working, with attachments, filter emptied or replaced as directed
- [ ] Two labelled spray bottles, a squeegee, and a bucket ready
- [ ] Rubber gloves (2 pairs), safety glasses, and a dust mask/N95 stored with the kit
- [ ] All cleaners stored up high or latched, in original labelled containers, away from food, heat, and damp
- [ ] Homemade mixes labelled with contents and date, replaced within a month
- [ ] Bleach checked — discarded if opened more than 6 months ago or weakened
- [ ] No bleach mixed with vinegar, ammonia, or any other cleaner — ever
- [ ] No cleaners stored in food or drink containers
- [ ] Unnecessary duplicates and single-use gadgets removed from the kit
- [ ] Damp cloths, sponges, and mops rinsed, wrung, and air-dried after every use

Notes