

35 EXTRAORDINARY USES FOR ORDINARY THINGS

PRODUCED BY KELSEY KLOSS

Reader's Digest thoroughly vetted these genius tricks so you can finish chores, make repairs, and clean messes in a breeze—using common items you already own.

EVERYDAY CLEANING HACKS

1 Aluminum foil scrubs pots clean. No scrub pad? Use aluminum foil as a temporary replacement. Crumple a handful and scour to polish stainless steel pots (foil may damage nonstick pots).

2 Kool-Aid unclogs a dishwasher. Soap scum can block pipes in dishwashers, causing the machines to not drain properly or even break down. Before you pay a plumber, pour Kool-Aid mix into the detergent dish and run a regular cycle with the



machine empty. (Any color is generally fine, but if the thought of adding red powder to a white machine makes you shudder, stick to lighter shades.) The Kool-Aid's citric acid removes soap scum.

3 Alka-Seltzer cleans coffeemakers. Fill the chamber of a drip coffeemaker with water. Drop in four Alka-Seltzer tablets. Once they dissolve, run a brew cycle to wash the machine's tubes. Rinse the chamber two to three times, then run another brew cycle with plain water. The sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and citric acid in the effervescent heartburn aid make it a powerhouse cleaner.

4 Cooking spray removes shower soap scum. Conventional cleaners don't dissolve stubborn soap buildup on shower doors. Spray the glass with cooking spray and leave for 30 minutes. The oil slides between the glass and the soap scum, making it easy to wash. Wipe off with soapy water (use a wet sponge with a drop of dishwashing liquid).

5 Sponges remove pet hair. Fido leaving your furniture furry? Lightly dampen a sponge, and rub it across upholstery. It will easily lift pet hair from the surface.

6 Ammonia cleans the oven. For almost effortless oven cleaning, fill a bowl with ammonia and set it in

an unheated oven overnight; remove the bowl the next day. The ammonia's fumes will have loosened the gunk so you can wipe it off with a wet sponge or paper towel.

UPGRADE YOUR LAUNDRY

7 Lemon juice lifts ink stains. Soak an ink stain in lemon juice for five to ten minutes before laundering in a normal cycle. The juice's citric acid is a natural stain fighter that breaks up the ink on clothing.

8 Pillowcases protect delicates. The washer can pull fragile sweaters and pantyhose out of shape. Toss them in a pillowcase. Close the case with a rubber band, place in the washer, and run the machine on a gentle setting.

9 Sugar removes grass stains. Enzymes in sugar help break down the chlorophyll that causes green stains. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar with just enough warm water to create a paste. Apply to the stain. Let sit for 30 minutes before washing.

10 Milk polishes leather. To clean patent leather (the glossy type used for belts, shoes, and purses), dip a soft cotton cloth into milk. Gently buff the leather in circular motions to moisturize. The milk's enzymes and fat soften and polish the leather. Buff again with a clean, dry cloth to remove remaining milk residue.

11 Vegetable shortening removes lipstick stains. Rub a dab of it into the lipstick mark, and launder as usual. The oil acts as a solvent to loosen the stain.

EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR STUFF

12 Sponges preserve soap. To help a bar of soap last longer, leave it on a sponge next to the sink or in the shower. The sponge will prevent slime and drips by helping soap dry faster.

13 Oven cleaner refreshes a curling iron. Styling gel or conditioner can cake onto curling irons, making them less efficient. Spray the iron (not plugged in) with a light coating of oven cleaner. Allow to sit for an hour. Wipe off with a damp rag and dry with a cloth for a curling iron that works like new.

14 Hair spray protects artwork. When your mini Picasso brings home a masterpiece, preserve it with a few spritzes of hair spray. This is especially handy for chalk and other materials that smudge easily.

15 Petroleum jelly prevents rust. Apply a thin layer to the surface in question (e.g., outdoor machinery, nuts and bolts, and chrome on bikes). The petroleum jelly will protect the metal from moisture and air, both of which encourage rust.

SHOOT! I JUST RAN OUT OF ...

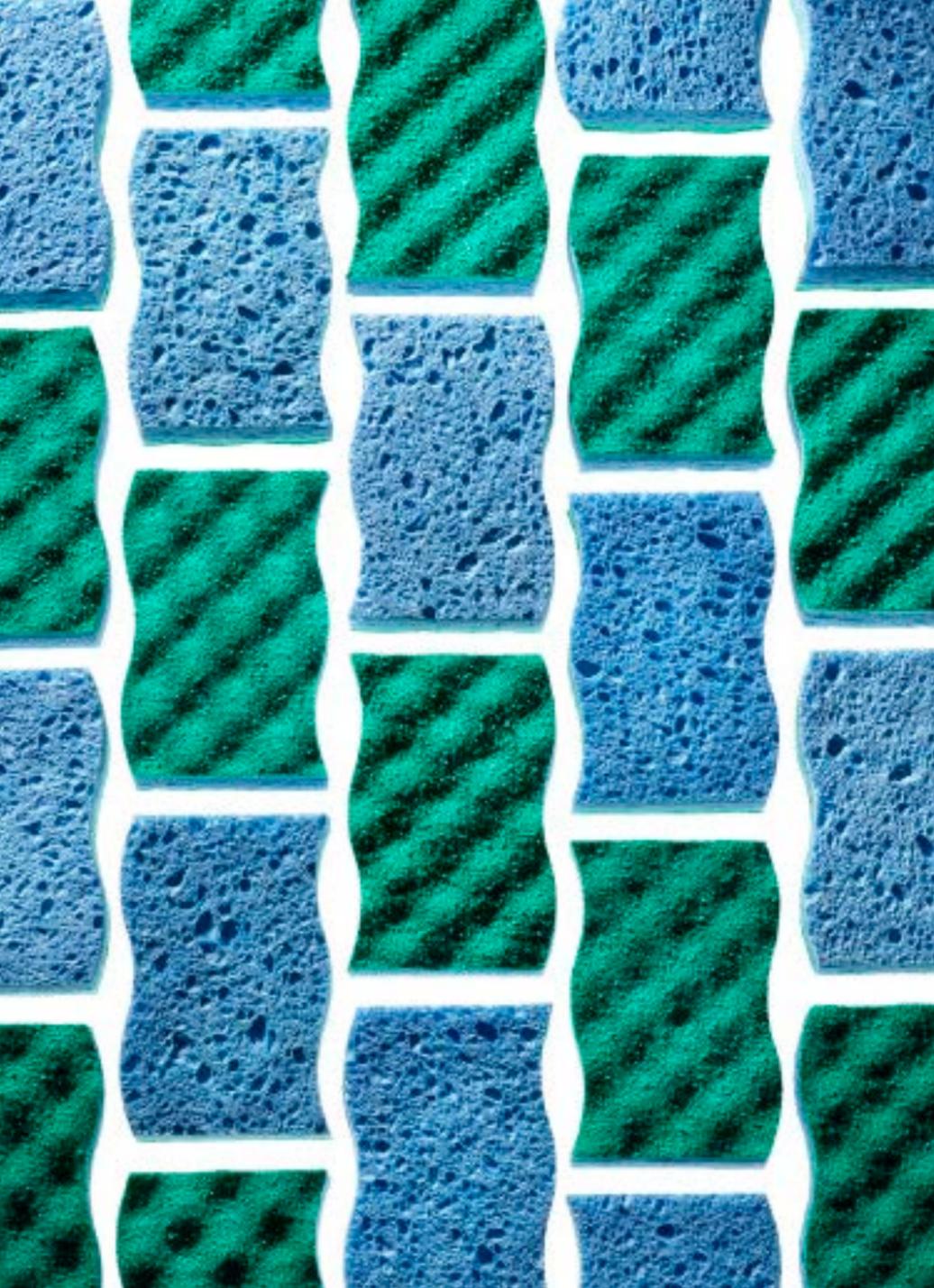
16 Deodorant. Milk of magnesia is commonly used as deodorant in humid, tropical environments. Normally taken as a laxative, it has antibacterial properties that make it difficult for odor-causing bacteria to flourish. (Lemon juice also deodorizes, by making your underarm too acidic for bacteria.) Apply with a cotton ball.

17 Dishwashing liquid. Shampoo (the plainer the better) will get the job done. Stick to using it in the sink—filling your dishwasher with shampoo may drown it in suds.

18 All-purpose cleaning spray. To clean up marks, glue, or paint from a table, try this teacher's trick: Spray a dollop of shaving cream on the surface and spread with a dry sponge. Leave for five to 15 minutes. Wipe off with a damp sponge. Essentially condensed soap, shaving cream will leave the table squeaky clean.

19 Shampoo. Sprinkle flour into your hair and shake throughout. The flour absorbs excess oils, leaving you with a fresh-looking mane.

20 Hand sanitizer. If you need to wash your hands while traveling but no bathroom is in sight, use antiseptic mouthwash. Put a few





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drops on your hands and rub like hand sanitizer. The mouthwash's high alcohol content attacks bacteria and gives skin a minty fresh scent.

BEFORE YOU THROW IT OUT

21 Butter tubs double as water dishes. When you travel with your pet, pack an empty, washed butter tub instead of a bulkier everyday bowl. The lightweight container makes a conveniently resealable food and water dish. It can also protect fragile dog biscuits.

22 Coffee lids protect shelves. Use a sturdy plastic lid from a coffee can as a pantry coaster. Slip it under containers that might drip—say, honey or salad dressing—to shield your shelves from a sticky mess.

23 Dryer sheets dust. Television and PC screens are electrically charged, which causes them to attract dust. Since the sheets are designed to reduce static cling, they'll remove dust and prevent it from resettling for several days. Polish glass screens with the sheets after they've been in the dryer, for a softer texture.

24 Cardboard tubes wrap extension cords. The simplest way to keep cords tangle-free in storage: Slip wrapped cords into toilet paper tubes and stack in a box. This also keeps a single cord tidy behind your desk.

POWER PLAYERS

BAKING SODA

"Baking soda is a mild base (alkali) that causes dirt and grease to dissolve easily in water, and it also deodorizes," says Steve Spangler, a bestselling author and the founder of Steve Spangler Science, a science education teaching-tools company.

25 Kill insects. If you spot cockroaches or other crawly creatures in your kitchen, mix equal parts baking soda and sugar, then sprinkle in the corners of the room. Insects are attracted to the sweet mixture but die when they can't properly digest the baking soda.

26 Lift stains from china. If your good china is tinted with discolorations from coffee and tea, dip a moist cloth in baking soda. This creates a stiff paste you can gently rub against stains to remove. Rinse clean and dry.

27 Strengthen dishwashing detergent. Add two tablespoons of baking soda to the usual amount of dishwashing liquid you use. It will give your detergent a powerful boost and easily clean greasy dishes.

28 Spruce wallpaper. To brighten a dingy section, wipe it with a sponge moistened in a solution of one quart water and one tablespoon

baking soda. For grease stains on wallpaper, rub a paste of one tablespoon baking soda and one teaspoon water on the stain. After five to ten minutes, wipe off with a damp sponge. Always test on an inconspicuous part of the paper first.

WD-40

WD-40's ingredients are top secret, but the company's research and development team says the product contains mineral spirits (solvents), which is why it can remove paint and glue. It also forms a lubricating surface, making it handy for unsticking items that just won't budge.

29 Remove glue. To loosen stubborn glue dried on scissors or a counter, cover it with WD-40. It can dissolve the adhesive components of even strong glue to make it easier to remove.

30 Prevent splintering. Wood handles on tools splinter over time. To protect your tools, spray a generous amount of WD-40 on the wood. This displaces moisture from the surface and creates a barrier against corrosive elements in the environment that can cause splintering.

31 Wipe off crayon marks. Kids turned your wall into a canvas? Spray crayon marks with WD-40 and wipe with a clean rag. It will not

damage paint and most wallpaper (remember to test on a small, hidden area first).

VINEGAR

"Vinegar is the common name for acetic acid, which is strong enough to kill bacteria but safe enough to consume and touch," notes Spangler.

32 Remove sweat stains from clothes. Mix one part vinegar with four parts water. Pour on the sweat stain and soak for one minute. Wash in a regular cycle.

33 Loosen bumper stickers. For pesky stickers that won't budge, soak a paper towel in vinegar. Place it over the sticker for five to ten minutes. The vinegar will weaken the adhesive.

34 Treat athlete's foot. Because vinegar is a potent disinfectant, soaking your feet twice daily for ten minutes in one part vinegar and four parts water may help treat this fungal infection.

35 Neutralize odors. Just cooked fish? Painted a room? Pour vinegar into a glass or bowl, and set it in the affected room for 30 minutes. **R**

Sources: Joey Green, author of *Joey Green's Cleaning Magic: Extraordinary Uses for Ordinary Things*, a *Reader's Digest* book; Rick Muscoplat, contributing editor and automotive expert at *Family Handyman*; WD-40 company's research and development department; Joe and Terry Graedon, authors of *Quick & Handy Home Remedies from the People's Pharmacy* and founders of *peoplespharmacy.com*; wd40.com; thekrazycouponlady.com; wisegeek.com; chemistry.about.com; lifehacker.com; apartmenttherapy.com; ollie.com; goaskalice.columbia.edu