

Traditional Alternatives to Modern Cleaning Products on a Boat

Most modern cleaning products, including so called eco-friendly ones, contain harmful or toxic ingredients to aquatic life – even the added fragrances are probably offensive. The following suggestions are far less harmful and as our Grandmothers used these methods they are tried and tested.

General Cleaner: Mix baking soda and vinegar, or combine lemon juice with borax paste.

Surface Cleaner: Mix approx. 1L of hot water, 1tsp vegetable oil based soap/detergent, 1 tsp borax and 2tbsp vinegar. Vinegar is used as a mild acid to cut grease, borax is used as a water softener (especially good with hard water) to prevent soapy deposits.

Degreaser: Mix a paste of lemon juice and borax.

Mildew Removers: Scrub with a paste made of equal parts of vinegar and salt. To inhibit mould and mildew, wash area with ½ cup borax to approx. 3.7L hot water.

Shampoo: Sprinkle baking soda over your hair and massage it through; rinse with warm water. Baking soda is gentle on hair and will not strip it of its natural hair oils; conditioner is not needed afterwards. You won't need to wash your hair as often, as after a few weeks it gets into a natural balance and no longer over-produces hair oils.

Fibreglass Cleaner: Use a paste of baking soda and water.

Aluminium Cleaner: Mix 1tbsp cream of tartar in approx. 1L of hot water.

Stainless Steel Cleaner: Mix baking soda or mineral oil for polishing; vinegar to remove spots.

Brass Cleaner: Use Worcestershire sauce! Or make a paste of equal amounts of salt, vinegar and water.

Copper Cleaner: Use lemon juice and water, or a paste made of equal amounts of lemon juice, salt and flour.

Chrome Polish: Use apple cider vinegar to clean; baby oil to polish.

Heads: Sprinkle in baking soda and scrub.

Heads Pipework: To remove scale build up in pipework: 1) pump the sea water out of the heads, 2) add puffed wheat (yes the cereal eaten at breakfast) to the toilet bowl, 3) add vinegar to soak the puffed wheat, 4) pump a few times until the vinegar soaked puffed wheat is all the way to the seacock outlet, 5) close the seacock outlet, 6) leave for several hours (overnight is best), 7) open the seacock and pump out the puffed wheat. The puffed wheat acts as a sponge to hold the vinegar against the pipework and breakdown the scale.

While vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice and vegetable oils are far less harmful than bleaches, scouring powders and detergents, they can still be toxic to aquatic life, so they should be used sparingly and in areas with plenty of dilution and flushing.