

Clean green

Families giving chemical-laden products the boot



Photo courtesy of Clorox



Photo courtesy of Metrop



Photo courtesy of Method

Several companies make green cleaning products. From left, Seventh Generation, Green Works by Clorox and Method.

By Lillia Callum-Penso

STAFF WRITER
lpenso@greenvillenews.com

It began with changing a basic cleaning product. Nancy Fitzer had just had her first child, now 12, and the thought occurred to her: Are my cleaning products safe? Fitzer, education director for Upstate Forever and mother of three, couldn't get the thought out of her head, so she changed from a standard product to a green

one. That bottle of Citra-Solv proved a gateway product. Now Fitzer uses green products for the bathtub, the toilet, the floors and, more recently, the laundry.

"I have a family of five, we do a lot of laundry," Fitzer says.

Fitzer made the switch a few years ago to Biokleen powder laundry detergent, which is phosphate- and chlorine-free. It's a win-win, says Fitzer, for the environment and for her

What are your favorite green-cleaning products? Share your tips for environmentally friendly cleaning by going to UpstateSC.MomLikeMe.com.

momlike me .com

family.

"It's better as far as what I'm putting into our water supply, it cleans fine and, actually, I feel like this saved a lot of money,"

See **GREEN** on page 3D

GREEN

FROM PAGE 1D

she says. "One cardboard container really lasts. And we have a lot of dirty laundry."

Awareness of "green cleaning" has grown along with the overall green movement. Consumers are much more knowledgeable about how chemicals and ingredients in their products can affect their families and the Earth, says Elizabeth Lapidus, community coordinator for Earth Fare in Greenville. She points to the sheer growth in the industry. Just a decade ago you could find only a few labels; now, she says, Earth Fare carries 12 brands.

"Think about oven cleaners and drain openers — if you read the back of a conventional cleaner, it says do not inhale, do not allow contact with skin," Lapidus says. The products contain sodium hydroxide, which "is very harmful when it's inhaled and burns through things like drain clogs. So if you touch it, it's going to cause a chemical burn on your skin. That's not something you really want to

have in your house, especially if you have small children.

"You may think you're knocking out dirt and harmful bacteria," Lapidus says, "when in reality you're actually adding more toxins to your home."

Concerns about family health are driving the trend toward green cleaning. Like Fitzer, Katurah Headley started switching her cleaning products after her youngest son was born 15 years ago. She uses Shaklee products, a line of all-natural cleaners that can be used for multiple household functions. The cost is higher, since Shaklee is member-based, but Headley says the cost is about the same as conventional cleaners because the concentrates last longer.

There is no regulating body for green cleaning products, so it's important to read ingredient labels, says Tina Valentin, owner of Green to Clean, billed as the area's only solely green cleaning service. It's just like food labels, she says — if the ingredients list is as long as the label, take that as a warning.

In general, cleaning products labeled green or all-natural contain only in-

gredients from the earth, are not tested on animals and are biodegradable.

Method, a company that produces numerous green cleaning products from sprays to scrubs, uses ingredients such as soy, coconut and palm oil to balance health and effectiveness. This year the 8-year-old company launched two new products, a toilet bowl cleanser that uses lactic acid to clean instead of bleach and a tile scrub that uses finely milled marble to achieve a deep clean.

"For us, when you see that term it means that 100 percent of the functional ingredients in the product are either found in nature or derived from natural sources," says Katie Molinari, public relations director for Method. "Functional ingredients refers to things that make the cleaner clean. So things like soaps, detergents, solvents, enzymes."

Lapidus says the ever-growing green movement has led to more effective products, wider availability and cheaper prices. It can't be so niche if big-name stores like Target, Publix and Bi-Lo are carrying them.

Now, if Headley forgets

to reorder her Shaklee products, she can run to the grocery store and still find products that meet her criteria. Target carries Method, Publix carries Seventh Generation, and Ingles and Bloom carry Citra-Solv.

Even traditional cleaning-product giants are tapping into green cleaning. Clorox, long known for bleach products, launched Green Works last year and the eco-friendly line has grown steadily, says Aileen Zerrudo of the Clorox Co.

"I think there's greater awareness of green living," Zerrudo says. "Similar to the way organic foods have taken off, other aspects of household products in terms of green are going through the same thing."

Green products have a renewed importance for Fitzer now that her children are old enough to help with the household chores.

"I guess, thinking about it, the first cleaner I did was for surfaces that my kids were touching," Fitzer says. "Now my kids are at an age where they're starting to clean the bathroom, not willingly, but if we send them in to clean the bathroom I feel better if they're using a safer product."

No "but Mom, it's harsh chemicals" excuses allowed.

Make your own

Cost can be an issue with natural cleaning products, which tend to be a little pricier than the old standards. Devotees will argue that the all-natural products are more concentrated, making them last longer. But there's a easy solution to the cost dilemma: Make your own.

Natasha Lyles has been making her own cleaners for more than a decade and has the art down to a science. Her basic all-purpose cleaner is one part water to one part vodka with 1-2 tablespoons of essential soap such as Dr. Bronner's or dishwashing liquid.

"Mixing up a cleaner doesn't take that much," says the mother of two. "You mix it up once and it lasts several cleanings. I get a funnel, a bottle, pour a little water and vodka and soap."

Both Lyles and her oldest son have severe allergies that make them very sensitive to harsh ingredients found in conventional cleaners, so the budget-conscious Lyles began experimenting.

The conventional formu-

la uses vinegar, but Lyles found vodka had a more neutral odor and was just as effective thanks to its high alcohol content. Cost: about \$15 a month. The basic cleaner works on floors, countertops, in the bathroom. For wood surfaces Lyles opts for mineral oil, and for mold or stains, she opts for pure peroxide.

"I think the whole green concept is something that we all should be looking into ... just because it's obvious that we've overused, we are overspending our environment," Lyles says.