

diy pros

Safer Paint

Here's a quick chemistry lesson. Not everything with "organic" in its name is actually good for us. When we walk into a newly painted room, the first thing we notice—besides the lovely color—is the smell, which comes largely from VOCs, chemicals added to paint to speed up drying time. Choose low- or zero-VOC paints; interior flat paint with VOC level of 50 grams per liter or less, and interior non-flat paint with 150 grams per liter or less. VOC content should be labeled on the packaging. Note: that low odor does not mean low VOC, some manufacturers use fragrance to mask the paint odor.



FSC Certified

The Forest Stewardship Council is an international organization whose certification process provides consumers with assurance that wood was harvested from well-managed forests and plantations. Be sure to look for the FSC label when purchasing wood. fscus.org

LEED Green Building Rating System

A national standard established by members of the US Green Building Council, it provides a framework for assessing building performance and sustainability. It is an acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. usgbc.org

Offgas

The release of vapors from a material; many materials in the home offgas formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). **TIP: Interior plywood emits urea formaldehyde (a carcinogen)—use exterior-grade plywood instead.**

Rapidly Renewable Resources

Don't contribute to deforestation; instead, use products made from rapidly renewable resources that regenerate quicker than the demand for the products—bamboo and cork for example.

VOCs

Volatile organic compounds are a range of chemical substances that become airborne, or volatile, at room temperature. They are found in paint, wood preservatives, aerosol sprays, glues, cleansers and disinfectants, moth repellents, dry-cleaned clothing, and even air fresheners. VOCs are a major source of indoor air pollution; exposure can cause symptoms ranging from nausea, eye irritation and headaches—just think of how your dog will feel being that much "nearer" to the source. **TIP: By choosing a zero to low-VOC water-based paint, you can really reduce, or even eliminate, this concern.**



Eco Cleaner

Vinegar, one of the oldest (and least expensive) cleaning substances available, is perfect for "green" cleaning. Among its many uses:

- Clean toilets—pour vinegar in, put the lid down, let stand overnight.
- Shine up windows—spray on, wipe dry with newspaper.
- Cut grease and "dog-spit" slipperiness—rinse dishes and dog bowls in a vinegar-and-water solution.
- Clean floors—1/2 cup to a gallon of water.
- Make copper and brass shine—use warm vinegar and salt.
- Keep drains free-running—pour 1 cup baking soda and 3 tbs. vinegar into the drain, flush with boiling water.

White vinegar is recommended for cleaning, and apple cider vinegar has many uses for pets, including soothing hot spots and cleaning ears. For more tips on vinegar's many uses, see frugalliving.about.com and earthclinic.com.

Does green building cost more?

It doesn't have to. Many green building features and products cost the same as, or even less than, their conventional counterparts. Other green features may cost more upfront but result in savings year after year. Energy-efficiency upgrades, for example, usually pay for themselves by lowering your monthly energy bill.

Here are two places to start your investigation. If you're thinking of remodeling or other large-scale projects, visit greenbuilder.com. For tips on home care, see care2.com/healthyliving.

