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Money-saving cleaners for spring

By Nedra Rhone. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Spring is in the air and it sure smells clean. The annual ritual of ridding our homes of winter's dust and dirt has begun. While some of us dread spring cleaning, you can do things to make it easier on yourself and your wallet. I chatted with Sue Perry, deputy editor of ShopSmart Magazine, where staffers test and compare hundreds of cleaning products year round. They recently highlighted some of the most effective money-saving cleaners. "You go to the grocery store and you think you are doing fine on your bill, but you put a couple of cleaning products in and the bill just skyrockets," Perry says. "It really can take a bite out of your budget." But it is possible to clean your home with just two products: Pine-Sol and Comet. Here are some cheap but effective products and strategies to consider as you face the task of cleaning your home this spring. Use affordable products that serve more than one purpose: One of the biggest surprises in the ShopSmart tests was Pine-Sol. "It beat 18 pricier cleaners and it left no streaks," Perry says. You can also dilute it (a quarter cup to one gallon of water)

and put it in a spray bottle. Ajax Lemon Dish Liquid performed as well as any other liquid for washing dishes, but was the cheapest among the brands tested. Perry says you can also use it as a general cleaner by mixing one teaspoon with a cup of warm water. Comet with Bleach performs great on a variety of jobs as well, including cleaning toilet bowls — a task that has an entire category of dedicated cleaners, Perry says. Make your own cleaners: Vinegar, ammonia, water and other ingredients you probably already have on hand can make very good cleaning products, Perry says. In addition to saving money, DIY formulas may be less toxic than store-bought cleaners. Mix seven pints of cold water, a half cup of soapy ammonia and one pint of rubbing alcohol in a squirt bottle for an effective glass



and window cleaner, Perry says. Or make an all-purpose cleaner with a half-cup of household ammonia and a teaspoon of dishwashing detergent without bleach.

Be sure to label your DIY products to avoid confusion and never mix ammonia with bleach, as it can produce deadly gasses. If you find DIY cleaners just don't cut it for you, you can always return to store-bought brands, Perry says. Control your portions: In ShopSmart's standardized tests, only one to two squirts of spray or a quarter teaspoon of liquid were effective in cleaning gunky globs of goo. If you need more product, add more, but start with smaller amounts. Get the right tools: "One thing you can do to save money is with sponges, scouring pads or laundry sheets, cut everything in half and you slash your costs by 50 percent," says Perry. Old toothbrushes or Q-tips can be used to clean tight crevices. Get organized: Spring cleaning isn't just about

cleaning. It also means reducing clutter and that too can be done on a budget, Perry says. Dollar stores are a great resource for plastic bins and other organizing tools, just make sure you're getting the right sizes and colors depending on their planned use, Perry says. Will it be visible or hidden away? How big is the space where it needs to fit and how much needs to fit inside? Do you need to see the items inside or do you want them hidden? Stay on schedule: Don't feel you need to finish all your spring cleaning in one day or weekend, but do give yourself a deadline, Perry says. "Start with something very small that could be done in 15 minutes. It will give you a sense of accomplishment and then it just keeps going."

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