

# Smelling Good *without* Toxic Chemicals

Safer Alternatives to Air Fresheners – A factsheet from Toxic Free NC

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## Air fresheners clean the air, right? *Wrong!*

Air fresheners actually *pollute* the air. They do nothing to “clean” the air or remove the source of odors: they simply cover the bad smells with the smell of chemicals!



**What is an air freshener?** It's a chemical mixture that is designed to mask odors. It may come in the form of a spray, solid, candle, liquid, or may plug into the wall.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), air fresheners may contain **formaldehyde**, **petroleum distillates**, **p-dichlorobenzene**, and/or aerosol **propellants**. They may also contain “fragrance” chemicals, many of which contain **phthalates**.

## Recipes for toxic-free “air fresheners” you can make at home:

**Stovetop:** Simmer some of your favorite spices in a mixture of water and vinegar on the stovetop. Cinnamon, cloves, ginger, anise, and lemon or orange peels all make great additions. Especially helpful for clearing cooking or trash odors from the kitchen!

**Spray bottle:** Mix a little lemon juice or a few drops of your favorite essential oil with water and put in a spray bottle for spritzing in the bathroom, or other stinky places. Be sure to get essential oil made from plants, *not* fragrance oil made from chemicals.

**Solid air freshener:** *Recipe adapted from Rebecca Lindamood at [www.foodiewithfamily.com](http://www.foodiewithfamily.com).*

### Ingredients & supplies:

- \* 1 ounce granulated or powdered gelatin
- \* 2 cups cold water, divided
- \* 20-30 drops of your choice of essential oil (Note: be sure to get *essential* oil, which is made from plants, and not *fragrance* oil, which is made from toxic chemicals.)
- \* 1 Tablespoon salt
- \* optional, food coloring to tint the air freshener
- \* heat-proof jars to hold the hot gelatin liquid
- \* a disposable chopstick or skewer to use as a stir stick

Directions: Boil one cup of water; sprinkle the gelatin over the boiling water and whisk until dissolved. Add the salt and the second cup of cold water and whisk. Set aside. Add the desired amount of essential oil and food coloring (if using) to the clean empty jar(s). Quickly pour the hot liquid gelatin over the essential oil and food coloring. Stir until evenly colored. Allow the jars to cool, uncovered on a heat-proof surface. When it

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reaches room temperature, place wherever you want a lovely scent.

## Tips for Preventing Bad Smells

**Vinegar, Baking Soda, Lemon Juice, Borax, and Sunlight** are all strong, safer odor-fighting cleaners, and they're cheap and easy to use, too! (Vinegar has a strong smell, but don't worry, it quickly disappears to leave nothing but a clean smell behind!)

**Take out the trash often.** Clean out trash containers regularly, and sprinkle a little baking soda into the clean can before you put in a new trash bag to keep bad smells at bay.

**Keep it clean & dry.** When you clean up spills and pet accidents, use a mixture of water and white vinegar or baking soda to neutralize bad smells. Try fans and dehumidifiers to get rid of smells in damp areas, and prevent mold growth too.

**Fresh air.** When the weather is good, open the windows to let in fresh air. Using a fan will help move air around and dry things out.

**Are air fresheners safe for our health?** The many toxic chemicals in air fresheners can cause or worsen a whole host of health problems:

- **Phthalates** are “endocrine disruptors,” meaning they can act like hormones in our bodies. This is especially **hazardous for growing children and pregnant women**.
- **Lung irritation** is a well-known side effect of the chemicals in air fresheners. This irritation can **trigger asthma attacks** for people who already have asthma. Research also shows that even occasional use of air fresheners can contribute to **developing asthma in adults**.
- May cause headaches & damage a person's sense of smell.
- **Formaldehyde** is a known ingredient in air fresheners and is listed by the EPA as a human carcinogen, meaning that exposure to it can cause cancer.

References & Sources for More Information:

**Formaldehyde & Cancer Risk, National Cancer Institute:**

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/formaldehyde>

**Environmental Protection Agency:** <http://www.epa.gov/kidshometour/products/airf.htm>

**Study Found Many Unlisted Chemicals in Products:**

[http://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2010/10/your\\_sweet-smelling\\_air\\_freshener/](http://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2010/10/your_sweet-smelling_air_freshener/)

**Alternatives for Cleaners & Air Freshener:**

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/protectyourfam.pdf>

**Homemade Essential Oil Air Fresheners:**

<http://www.foodiewithfamily.com/2010/03/17/homemade-essential-oil-air-fresheners/>

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