

Alternative Uses for Common Household Items

Special Report Courtesy of [The Household Helper Talk Show & Podcast](#)

I'm always on the look-out for cheap and easy household tips. I especially like re-using items I already have in the house to solve a problem.

Haven't you wondered how to prevent the bottom of the shaving cream can from rusting? How about how to keep slugs out of your garden? And just how do you prevent your good silver from tarnishing?

The following pages are some of my favorite tips on how to use ordinary household items to solve everyday problems. I've been collecting these kinds of tips for years. Some really are problem solvers and some are just for fun – with a purpose to reduce waste.

Cara Mirabella, [The Household Helper](#)

Empty Wine Bottles

Make a soap dispenser: Grab a pour spout and your creative juices to create a unique, handy gadget that'll help keep your kitchen clean.

Use one as the base for a new lamp: All it takes is a lamp kit, a bottle, and a drill (with a glass or ceramic-cutting drill bit).

Crank up the romance with an oil lamp with a wine-bottle base: Pick up a long wick, some lamp oil, a ceramic wick stopper, and a small glass flame-protector, and you're good to go.

Reuse your wine bottles as colorful, creative candleholders.

And speaking of wine, what about the old corks?

Gather a good number of corks to make a trivet (or cut the corks you have into 1/4 inch slices) by wiring them together

Glue them into an empty picture frame (without the glass) to make a message board (aka cork board)

I stab my sharp utensils into them, such as fondue forks or skewers, so they don't poke me when stored in a drawer

Newspapers

Assemble a fire-starting kit

Crumple or shred and use as packing material

Donate to your local shelter for lining puppy pens

Prep your garden bed - use in place of weed fabric or plastic

Scrunch some up for cleaning windows

Stuff into an orphan sock for an instant crinkle toy for kitty

Use the funnies section for interesting wrapping paper (tip: use the funnies from that person's birthday for a personalized touch)

Tennis Balls

Use them as dog toys, or, if you have one too many tennis balls, donate them to other playful pups at the local animal shelter

Donate them to a senior center or assisted-living facility-tennis balls make great skid stoppers on the legs of walkers

Use on the metal end of a hammer (pop it through by cutting a "X" in the tennis ball) for softer hammering on more delicate materials

Fluff up laundry by throwing a couple into your clothes dryer

Use on top of sharp garden stakes if you're an accident-prone gardener

Hang from the ceiling of the garage to help you tell where the wall is when you're backing up the car

Stick on the end of a bicycle kickstand to prevent it from sinking into the mud or grass

Stick one on the end of a pole to remove cobwebs and dust from ceiling corners

Child-proof spiky points around the house

Cut in half and fill with beer to make a slug trap in the garden

Orphaned Socks

Make a sock puppet

Protect fragile holiday ornaments when you put them away for the year

Use as a rag or furniture-polish cloth (I use an old sock, turned inside out to dust my vertical blinds)

Fill with ice for an instant ice pack

Use as a whiteboard eraser

Send to Operation Happy Sock, where it'll be stuffed with polyfill and catnip for cats at the local animal shelter (link: <http://www.operationhappysock.com/>)

Slip a pair over the hands of a nailbiter, or a kid with a rash or hives

Coffee Filters (basket shaped)

Recycle frying oil. After frying, strain oil through a sieve lined with a coffee filter.

Place chopped ingredients in a coffee filter on a kitchen scale.

Coffee filters make convenient wrappers for messy foods such as tacos.

Line a plant pot with a coffee filter to prevent the soil from leaking through the drainage holes.

Clean windows and mirrors. Coffee filters are lint-free so they'll leave your windows sparkling.

Separate your good dishes by putting a coffee filter between each dish to protect them.

Aluminum Foil

Keep dogs and cats off furniture. Place pieces of aluminum foil on the furniture. The sound of rustling foil frightens pets.

Place a piece of aluminum foil under the ironing board cover to reflect the heat from the iron.

Tear off a sheet of aluminum foil a few inches larger than baking pan. Place foil on the oven rack below the food being baked. (To prevent damage to the oven, do not use foil to line the bottom of the oven.)

Use a piece of crumpled-up aluminum foil to polish the chrome on car bumpers, strollers, highchairs, and playpens

Improvise a funnel. Double over a piece of aluminum foil and roll into the shape of a cone.

Place aluminum foil across the top of a glass jar filled with water. Poke holes in the foil and insert the cuttings securely in place. The foil also prevents the water from evaporating too quickly.

Prevent steel wool from rusting. Wrap the pad in aluminum foil and store it in the freezer.

Run the iron over a piece of aluminum foil to clean off starch.

Wrap the wet paint brushes in aluminum foil and store them in your freezer. When you're ready to paint again, defrost the brushes for an hour or more.

To prevent a layer of skin from forming over the paint surface when you're storing a can, set the paint can on top of a sheet of aluminum foil, trace around it, cut out a disc of foil, and place it on the paint surface before sealing the can closed.

Chalk

Draw a line of chalk around windows and doors outside your home, and around water pipes inside your home. Ants will not cross a chalk line.

Clean ring-around-the-collar. Mark the stain heavily with white chalk. The chalk will absorb the sebum oil that holds in the dirt.

Place a piece of chalk in your silver chest to absorb moisture and prevent tarnishing.

Cover spots on white suede. Rub with chalk.

Place a few pieces of chalk in your toolbox to absorb moisture to prevent rusting

Prevent dampness in a closet. Tie together a handful of chalk and hang the bundle from the clothes rod to absorb moisture.

To prevent a screwdriver from slipping. Rub chalk on the tip.

Fill a hole in a plaster wall. Insert a piece of chalk into the hole, cut it off even with the wall, then plaster.

Slugs will not cross a chalk line.

Remove grease. Rub chalk on a grease spot on clothing or table linens, let it absorb the oil, then brush off. Launder as usual.

Clear Nail Polish

Stop a run in nylons. Paint the snag immediately.

Dab the center of each button with clear nail polish to reinforce the threads so buttons stay on longer

Laminate prescription labels. Keep prescription labels clear and readable by painting them with clear nail polish.

Apply a thin coat of clear nail polish along seam edges to prevent fabric from unraveling.

Repair a small dent in a window, auto windshield, or wood floor. Fill hole with a few drops of clear nail polish, let it dry, then add a few more drops until full.

Prevent the knots of small ribbons on lingerie from coming untied. Dab the knots with clear nail polish.

Prevent rust on screws in moist areas.

Paint the bottom edges of a can with clear nail polish to prevent rusting such as shaving cream.

Dip the end of thread in clear nail polish to easily thread a needle. Let dry, then thread.

Tighten loose dresser drawer knobs. Dip the end of the screw in clear nail polish and replace the knob in the hole to dry snugly.

Keep belt buckles shiny. Paint clear nail polish on the buckle, allow to dry, repeat four times.

Kitty Litter (they clay kind)

Create emergency traction for automobiles. Keep a bag of kitty litter in your car trunk in case you get stuck in the ice or snow. When poured under the tire, it provides excellent traction.

Skk up car oil and transmission fluid. kitty litter works as an absorbent to pick up transmission leaks from garage floors. Pour a thick layer of unused kitty litter over the puddle, wait 24 hours, and sweep up with a broom. Scrub clean with a solution of detergent and hot water.

Cover bottom of garbage can with one inch of unused kitty litter to absorb grease and moisture.

Prevent musty, damp odors in a closed summer house. Fill shallow boxes with unused kitty litter. Place one in each room before closing up the house to soak up musty, lingering odors.

Fill the feet of knee high hose with unused kitty litter, tie the ends, and place inside sneakers overnight to deodorize.

Prevent grease fires in barbecue grills. Cover bottom of grill with a three-quarter inch layer of unused kitty litter to reduce fires.

Petroleum Jelly (Vaseline)

Smear petroleum jelly on clean car battery terminals to prevent corrosion

Repair stains, rings, and minor scratches in wood furniture. Cover each scratch with a liberal coat of petroleum jelly, let sit for 24 hours, rub into wood, wipe away excess, and polish as usual.

Stop a faucet from screeching. Remove the handle and stem, and coat both sets of metal threads with petroleum jelly.

Lubricate roller skate and skateboard wheels. Smear petroleum jelly around the cylinders on the wheels so they roll faster.

Petroleum jelly, rubbed into a baseball glove, softens the leather.

Prevent rust on outdoor machinery by applying a generous coat of petroleum jelly.

Avoid splattered paint on windows, metal work, and floors. Before painting a room, dip a Q-tips Cotton Swab in petroleum jelly and run it around the edges of the glass; coat door hinges, doorknobs, lock latches; and spread a thin coat of petroleum jelly along a linoleum or tile floor (obviously not carpet) where it meets the wall. Paint smears will wipe off with a cloth.

Prevent the cap from sticking shut on nail polish bottles. Put a thin coat of petroleum jelly around the rim of the bottle.

Remove lipstick stains from linen napkins. Apply petroleum jelly before washing.

Prevent hair-coloring from dying your skin. Rub petroleum jelly along hairline before coloring your hair.

Stop refrigerator racks from sticking. Coat the edges of the racks with petroleum jelly so the racks glide easily. This works for just about any drawer with metal tracks. Also works on sliding doors.

Coat the insides of candle holders with petroleum jelly so wax slides out.

Shine leather shoes. Rub petroleum jelly over the leather and wipe off the excess with a towel.

Nylon Pantyhose

Protect rolls of wrapping paper by slipping them in tubes made by cutting the leg sections of pairs of pantyhose.

Prevent spray bottles from clogging by covering the open end of the tube with a small square of pantyhose held in place with a rubber band.

Tie up tomato vines to keep them off the ground.

To save space in your luggage, tightly roll up your clothes, then stretch the tube sections of your pantyhose over them.

Use leg sections to store onions and potatoes. Tie a knot and hang up.

Stretch a pair of pantyhose over a wire frame made from an old hanger and use as a pond or pool skimmer.

Tie up boxes, newspapers, and magazines.

Crumple a pair up and use as a pot or dish scrubber.

Cover rolling pin with a tube of pantyhose to prevent wet flour from sticking.

Store flower bulbs in winter.

Line a piece of pantyhose at the bottom of a garden pot to prevent soil from washing out when excess water drains out.

Use to cover a kid's bug jar, instead of hammering holes through the lid.

Use to filter lumps of old paint by stretching a piece of pantyhose over a new can and securing with a rubber band.

If you've lost something small and valuable, find it by wrapping a piece of pantyhose over the nozzle of your vacuum-cleaner hose, turning on the vacuum, and sweeping very carefully over your floor. Your lost item should stick to the ad-hoc filter you just made.

Vinegar

Arthritis tonic and treatment; 2 spoonfuls of apple cider vinegar and honey in a glass of water several times daily.

Make your catsup and other condiments last long by adding vinegar.

Hardened paint brushes: simmer in boiling vinegar and wash in hot soapy water.

To clear up respiratory congestion, inhale a vapor mist from steaming pot containing water and several spoonfuls of vinegar.

When boiling eggs, add some vinegar to the water to prevent white from leaking out of a cracked egg.

When poaching eggs, add a teaspoon of vinegar to the water to prevent separation

To remove lime coating on your tea kettle; add vinegar to the water and let stand overnight.

Avoid cabbage odor by adding vinegar to the cooking water.

Prevent discoloration of peeled potatoes by adding a few drops of vinegar to water. They will keep fresh for days in fridge.

Add 1 tsp. vinegar to cooking water for fluffier rice.

Add vinegar to laundry rinse water: removes all soap and prevents yellowing.

After shampoo hair rinse: 1 ounce apple cider vinegar in 1 quart of distilled water.

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Baking Soda

To make your own baking powder, stir and sift together 2 parts of Cream of Tartar to 1 part baking soda and 1 part cornstarch.

Gargle with 1/2 tsp. baking soda in 1/2 glass of water. Freshens and cleans your mouth.

Used as a mouthwash, baking soda will also relieve canker sore pain.

To relieve sunburn: use a paste of baking soda and water.

Bug bites: use a poultice of baking soda and vinegar.

Bee sting: use a poultice of baking soda and water.

Add to water to soak dried beans to make them more digestible.

Oil and grease - stained clothing washes out better with soda added to the washing water

Be sure to keep an extra box of baking soda by your stove in case of grease or electrical fire. Scatter the powder by the handful to safely put it out.

Keep a container of baking soda in your garage as well as in your car to put out a fire. It won't damage anything it touches.

Baking soda will also put out fires in clothing, fuel, wood, upholstery and rugs.

Clean vegetables and fruit with baking soda. Sprinkle in water, soak and rise the produce.

Polish silverware with dry soda on a damp cloth. Rub, rinse and dry.

For silver pieces without raised patterns or cemented-on handles: place the silver on aluminum foil in an enamel pot. Add boiling water and 4 tbsp. baking soda. Let stand, rinse and dry.

Reduce odor build-up in your dishwasher by sprinkling some soda on the bottom.

Run your dishwasher through its cycle with soda in it instead of soap to give it a good cleaning.

Salt

If a pie bubbles over in your oven, put a handful of salt on top of the spilled juice. The mess won't smell and will bake into a dry, light crust which will wipe off easily when the oven has cooled.

Salty water boils faster when cooking eggs.

Add a pinch of salt to whipping cream to make it whip more quickly.

Gelatin sets more quickly when a dash of salt is added.

Fruits put in mildly salted water after peeling will not discolor.

Fabric colors hold fast in salty water wash.

Freshen sponges by soaking them in salt water.

Eliminate excess suds with a sprinkle of salt.

Add a little salt to the water your cut flowers will stand in for a longer life.

Pour a mound of salt on an ink spot on your carpet; let the salt soak up the stain.

Clean your iron by rubbing some salt on the damp cloth on the ironing surface.

Adding a little salt to the water when cooking foods in a double boiler will make the food cook faster.

Add salt to green salads to prevent wilting.

Test the freshness of eggs in a cup of salt water; fresh eggs sink; bad ones float.

Soak stained hankies in salt water before washing.