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HOME + GARDEN (GREEN CLEAN)

Detox Your Home: In the Living Room, Part 1



LIVING ROOM

Though it seems like our homes should be safe havens from the pollution that lurks outside, indoor air quality actually tends to worse than that beyond our front doors. But you can put the "live" back in "living room" by following the simple steps outlined below, and showing any unwelcome guests the door.

Tips for greener living spaces

1. Clear the air. Most of us think of our homes as sanctuaries from the hectic and dirty world beyond our front doors. But **indoor air pollution** can actually be several times worse than that outside. Why? Because things like furniture such made from particle board and medium-density fiberboard (MDF), carpets with PVC backing, and varnishes full of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can off-gas chemicals such as formaldehyde and benzene.

You can improve your indoor air quality—without replacing your decor—by keeping rooms properly ventilated and opening windows from time to time. Regularly cleaning or replacing air-conditioner and furnace filters and keeping air ducts clear is another effective step in removing pollutants such as bacteria, mold, viruses, and pollen from indoor air, while helping keep equipment working at maximum efficiency. Another simple tip: **Remove shoes at the door**, which means you'll track fewer toxins throughout the house. Want more tips? Check in with Sara Snow via video below.*



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2. **Get fresh.** Air fresheners—actually, almost anything with artificial fragrance—are likely to contain phthalates, a group of chemicals often used to “fix” scents, or make them stay put. To [freshen your home naturally](#), choose all-natural, hypoallergenic products packaged in non-aerosol containers, such as [Citrus Magic](#). You can also [make your own room scent](#) by simply filling a mister bottle with water and a few drops of essential oil, or by placing sweet-smelling cut flowers in a vase. If you like to use scented candles, opt for petroleum-free versions made from beeswax or [soy wax](#).

3. **Get the lead out.** Lead is a commonplace and dangerous neurotoxin that can be found in paint in many houses. As it chips and chafes from walls, windowsills, woodwork, and other surfaces, it can get into dust, from which it can more easily enter into our bodies. That goes especially for little ones, whose immune systems aren’t as tough. Learn [how to detect lead paint](#) or have your home professionally tested; then, if necessary, have the paint removed by a lead-abatement specialist. Whether you’ve got a lead problem or not, when it comes time to repaint walls, look for [low-VOC paints](#), which contains much fewer of the chemicals responsible for health problems ranging from headaches to cancer.

4. **Don’t give toxins the floor.** Wall-to-wall [carpeting](#) can be a source of mold, dust mites, and other allergens, as well as VOCs from plastic backings. If you have the option, opt for hardwood floors—ideally the wood will come from sustainably managed forests—treated with a nontoxic finish; cork, which has natural antibacterial properties and comes from a renewable resources, as well as linoleum, which is made from linseed oil, are other good choices. For added coziness, area rugs made from wool, cotton, hemp, or jute add warmth but are easy to clean without chemical cleaners. Here’s a surprising tip: You can use [snow](#) to clean a wool rug. Why? Freezing cold temperatures harden and break up bits of grease, and will also kill dust mites.

5. **Do a safety check.** To further ensure a healthy indoor environment, test your home for radon, a radioactive gas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that one out of every 15 American homes has [elevated levels](#) of radon. To make sure yours doesn’t, purchase an inexpensive do-it-yourself radon testing-kit from any hardware store, or hire a [qualified radon tester](#).

Next: [Getting the goods for good clean air. Plus, Sara Snow's bright ideas.](#)

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**Furnishings in this video were provided by [Verde Home in Atlanta, Georgia.](#)*

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by Petz Scholtus, Barcelona
on 02.21.08

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