

Old-School Cleaning, the Palestinian Way

By Najla Abdellatif Vallander

Air deodorizers, surface cleaners, tough-stain laundry detergents, fresh-scent dishwasher detergents, disinfecting wipes, bathroom cleaners, furniture polish, adhesive removers. The list goes on. Commercial shampoos with a range of artificial smells for every hair type. Deodorants with antiperspirant and odor-fighting qualities. Whitening toothpastes. Lotions.

Hundreds of different hygiene and cleaning products have made their way into our supermarkets. The overwhelmingly long colorful rows with all types of cleaning products stacked on shelves are not only filled with toxic chemicals, but they are packaged almost exclusively in plastic.

Our homes are glutted with cleaning products with artificial fresh scents that are tremendously chemically loaded. Since when have we become obsessed with having disinfected, germ-free homes? It has gone so far that the traditional cleaning solutions have been almost obliterated. These, sadly, have been replaced with the standard chlorine and Dettol bottles, found in almost every Palestinian home.

In an attempt to learn about the local old-fashioned way, I turned to my older relatives to look back on their cleaning and bathing rituals pre-sixties and fifties. I was surprised to realize that the classic Nabulsi olive oil soap cuboid, *sabooneh Nabulsiyeh*, functioned as an all-purpose cleaner, literally. It was used for washing body, hair, teeth (!), dishes, laundry, and even for shaving. The *sabooneh Nabulsiyeh* is a healthy and eco-friendly alternative for ourselves and our homes, and at the same time it supports local Palestinian soap producers. It can even be found package-free in some shops.



Traditional cleaning methods even had minimal waste. The small leftover soap bits were put in a bucket of water to be used for cleaning floors and windows. Old cut-up rags were used for washing dishes and cleaning surfaces instead of the plastic and paper towels widely used today.

The loofah was also a cleaning essential. This old-fashioned sponge is made of natural materials; it can easily be found in shops and can be used for washing dishes, removing tough stains, and showering.

There are a lot of homemade detergent recipes that work effectively and are easy to make. An all-purpose cleaner that I make at home is all natural and can be used for cleaning surfaces, toilets, and wooden cabinets. Place some citrus peels in a glass jar that is half-full of white vinegar. Let it sit for three to seven days. Then add enough water to fill the jar and dilute the solution, which can then be poured into a reusable, preferably glass, spray bottle. It is optional to add some drops of essential oil to give it a fresh smell. For tough stains, use baking soda.

Hygiene and cleaning should not be hazardous to ourselves or to the planet. Much can be learned from traditional local cleaning routines that work in our favor. Instead of opting for toxic quick-fixes, it is worth looking back at these original solutions that are clean, healthy, and result in minimal waste.

Through her blog, *Zero Waste Palestine*, Najla sheds a light on climate-change-related issues by promoting sustainable and waste-free practices for Palestinian households.