

Eco-Safe Boat Cleaning Products

By Dale Wilde, FOLKS President

South Carolina is home to over 800,000 registered boat owners. All boat owners at some point in the boating season will clean the surfaces of their boats. What goes on the hulls and surfaces of their boats ultimately ends up in our creeks, rivers, and estuaries. Harsh, toxic cleaners can be harmful to marine life and water quality. Cleaning products are necessary for dissolving and removing dirt, grime, allergens, and germs. However, most cleaning products are not made to be directly released into our waterways. Ingredients in certain cleaners can damage fish tissues or persist in the environment and enter the food chain. Some products also contain phosphorous and nitrogen, which can put excess nutrients into the water causing algal bloom, which can be harmful to lakes, coral reefs, and coastal ecosystems.

Many commercial cleaners used on boats contain toxic chemicals that can enter waterways during boat cleaning and harm the lake's aquatic life. Do not use toxic detergents containing ammonia, sodium hypochlorite, or chlorinated solvent.

The optimal cleaning routine is to frequently wash your boat with a sponge and plain water to avoid the buildup that calls for harsh cleaners. Get in the habit of rinsing your boat after you pull it out of the water and again before you start washing it.



This will get rid of any surface dust that might end up scratching the finish. Different materials make up the interior and exterior of your boat. These materials need different cleaners if you want them to last and stand up to the wear and tear they suffer on the water. Use phosphate-free, biodegradable, and nontoxic cleaners. Though much less harmful, these cleaners can still cause damage to local aquatic life and should be used only on land when possible. Wax your boat—a good coat of wax prevents surface dirt from becoming ingrained. Regular use of your boat is one of the best ways to keep the bottom clean.

Do not scrape the hull of your boat on your own. Take your boat to a marina with an approved boat cleaning facility.

The best way to keep toxic chemicals out of the water is to not use them at all. Eco-friendly boat cleaning practices include the following: vinegar, lemon juice, borax, baking soda, cornstarch, salt, and fresh water. These options are not only safer for your family, our waterways, and wildlife—they're also extremely inexpensive to make. And they rely on supplies you likely already

have at home: baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, and salt.



Eco-Friendly Boat Cleaning Products

Toxic Product	Safer Alternative
All-Purpose Cleaner	Mix one cup white vinegar with two gallons water.
Aluminum Cleaner	2 Tablespoons cream of tartar in 1 quart hot water
Ammonia-Based Cleaners	Vinegar, salt, and water
Bleach	Borax or hydrogen peroxide
Bronze Cleaner	Lemon juice and baking soda or equal parts of flour and salt with enough vinegar to make a paste
Chrome Cleaner	Apple cider vinegar to clean; baby oil to polish.
Fiberglass Stain Remover	Baking soda paste
Floor Cleaner	One cup vinegar in 2 gallons water.
General Cleaner	Baking soda and vinegar. Or lemon juice combined with borax paste.
Head Cleaner	Put in baking soda and use a brush.
Mildew Remover	Paste using equal parts of lemon juice and salt or white vinegar and salt.
Rug/ Upholstery Cleaner	Sprinkle on dry cornstarch and then vacuum.
Scouring Powders	Baking soda or salt. Or rub area with one-half of a lemon dipped in borax, then rinse.
Stainless Steel Cleaner	Baking soda or mineral oil for polishing, vinegar to remove spots.
Varnish Cleaner	Wipe with 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/2 cup water solution
Window Cleaner	Mix 2 tablespoons vinegar in one quart of water or rub glass with news paper.

List of Eco-Friendly Boat cleaning products reprinted with permission: <https://www.lakegeorgeassociation.org/protect/lake-friendly-boating/boat-cleaning/> ❖