

Do-It-Yourself Laundry Detergent

by Stacy Johnson

According to soap super-seller Proctor and Gamble (their Tide label alone accounts for more than 40% of all laundry detergent used in the U.S.) Americans are doing 1,100 loads of laundry every minute of every day.

And it's certainly possible that, thanks to new concentrates, many of those loads feature too much detergent.

As you've probably noticed, the latest twist in detergent is to sell us less product at a higher price with "ultra-new-and-improved" concentrates. "Use less soap, save the planet" is the basic idea. But smaller quantities mean more precise measuring is needed: fail to pay attention and you'll pour too much, which doesn't help the earth or your budget ... but does benefit Proctor and other purveyors of these products. . . .

Consider this dirty little secret the suds salesmen don't want you to know: Some people get by with no detergent at all. Many others save 90% of the cost of store-bought by making it themselves.

Is Detergent Even Necessary?

I recently did a TV news story showing people how to make their own laundry detergent for a fraction of the cost of store bought. (It's right here on Yahoo!: check it out.) As I said in my story, while it may sound impossible, laundry detergent may not even be necessary at all.

The blog Funny about Money decided to forgo it completely as part of an experiment. Here's a quote: "By and large, all of the freshly washed clothing came out with an odor: It smelled of clean water!"

You might be surprised to learn that, while clothing has been around since the fig leaf, laundry detergent is relatively new. And yet, ancient people were presumably able to make their clothing at least somewhat clean. How? As it turns out, something that may be even more effective than soap is agitation. Ancient people used rocks and rivers, but your modern washing machine can clean lightly soiled clothes by just pushing them around in water.

In other words, people actually do get away without using detergent at all. But if the idea of using nothing more than water to wash your gym socks sounds a little scuzzy, not to worry. You can still wring significant savings from your laundry money by making your own detergent. It's not hard.

A quick search online will show you that there's no shortage of homemade laundry soap recipes: Here's one from The Simple Dollar. And we've got 10 more at Money Talks News. But below is one that seems to work pretty well.

The Recipe

You'll need:

- 4 cups of water.
- 1/3 bar of cheap soap, grated.
- 1/2 cup washing soda (not baking soda).
- 1/2 cup of Borax (20 Mule Team).
- 5-gallon bucket for mixing.
- 3 gallons of water.

First, mix the grated soap in a saucepan with 4 cups of water, and heat on low until the soap is completely dissolved. Add hot water/soap mixture to 3 gallons of water in the 5-gallon bucket, stir in the washing soda and Borax, and continue stirring until thickened. Let the mix sit for 24 hours, and voila! Homemade laundry detergent.

Of course, who'd post a recipe without trying it out first? I made and washed several loads of clothes with the homemade detergent. And I, like many before me who've traveled this road, couldn't tell the difference between store-bought and homemade.

Total cost per load? In the neighborhood of **2 cents**. Store-bought detergent, depending on what you buy and where you buy it, can cost about 20 cents per load -- 10 times more.

So, there are at least two alternatives to the agitation of paying too much for laundry detergent: Ditch it altogether and use nothing more than water in your washer, or save up to 90% by making your own laundry detergent.

And here's a final idea for those who, like me, are unlikely to choose either of those options. Since doing this story, I haven't started making my own laundry detergent. I still use the same store-bought concentrate I started with. But I've started using **half the amount**. Result? No difference at all that I can detect. Now we're really talking green.

Maybe it's time we all laundered a little money!