

## The microwave lemon trick – and 10 other household hacks that actually work

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

*hack*: a good solution or piece of advice

##### a. Discuss the questions.

1. What household chores do you generally need to do? Do you relish or dread them?
2. What sources do you turn to for difficult cleaning or other household conundrums?
3. What are your favourite household hacks?

#### 2 Key words

##### a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a long, thin wooden or metal pin used for holding together pieces of food during cooking. (paragraph 1)
2. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is made specially for a particular person or situation. (paragraph 2)
3. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is poisonous or very harmful. (paragraph 3)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a growth that develops on old food or things that have been left in warm, wet air for too long. (paragraph 3)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ means *related to a kind of brain that is often considered different from what is usual*. (paragraph 4)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ are the small pieces of a solid that sink to the bottom of a liquid, e.g., coffee. (paragraph 5)
7. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to burn slowly and without flames. (paragraph 5)
8. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is not clear. (paragraph 7)
9. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is dirty. (paragraph 8)
10. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to heat or cook something in a microwave. (paragraph 8)
11. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that makes a substance neutral or stop it from having an effect. (paragraph 9)
12. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to put something through a sieve (a wire net in the shape of a bowl) to break up large pieces. (paragraph 9)

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13. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to have an unpleasant smell. (Paragraph 10)
14. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to cook something liquid slightly below boiling point. (paragraph 11)

**b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.**

1. Their lab studies the unique creative skills of \_\_\_\_\_ individuals, primarily people with autism.
2. I have to clean my glasses constantly – they get \_\_\_\_\_ all the time.
3. Coffee \_\_\_\_\_ and eggshells make for an excellent fertiliser.
4. She invested in a good mask to protect her from \_\_\_\_\_ compounds while she works with clays in her ceramics studio.
5. The stove gets really \_\_\_\_\_, so I try to clean it after every meal I cook.
6. Burritos are my go-to quick lunch. I make a batch at a time, freeze them, and then \_\_\_\_\_ them for a minute or two when I'm hungry.
7. Oh no, my shoes really \_\_\_\_\_!
8. Citrus oils like grapefruit or lemon oil are wonderful natural odour \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The secret to making a great chilli or curry is to let it \_\_\_\_\_ for more than an hour.
10. The recipe calls for \_\_\_\_\_ the flour before mixing it with the other ingredients.
11. They have a \_\_\_\_\_ bookshelf that covers an entire wall of their study.
12. I saw footage of the aftermath of the fire; what was left of the house was still \_\_\_\_\_ after hours.
13. Black \_\_\_\_\_ usually forms when there is a lot of condensation and a lack of ventilation; it can cause allergic reactions.

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#### **Clean pans, blitz stains ... experts share their best domestic shortcuts**

Rebecca Seal

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#### 1 Rig up a watering system

Keep pot plants alive while you're on holiday with this ingenious set-up from Armen Adamjan. Take a discarded plastic bottle, pierce the cap with the tip of a sharp knife and stick a cotton bud through the hole. Fill the bottle with water, replace the lid, tape a skewer or small bamboo cane to the side of the bottle so it extends about 20cm beyond the lid, and turn the whole thing upside down (a hole in the base of the bottle will help the water flow). Poke the skewer into the soil at the base of a potted plant and the water will slowly drip down the cotton bud until you get back.

#### 2 Sew your own luxury curtains

"Bespoke curtains are very expensive, but you can customise ready-made ones easily," says Kate Watson-Smyth, homes writer and podcaster. "Buy two sets – four curtains – and sew them together using two for each side of the window to give a sense of luxury and fullness. Alternatively, buy flat linen sheets and sew ruffle tape along the top for hooks." (This will also make them pull more easily than fabric tab tops, which tend to stick.) A personal favourite hack: if your curtains don't pull smoothly, spritz the rail with furniture polish.

#### 3 Make your own all-purpose cleaner

In an attempt to avoid noxious chemicals, Nancy Birtwhistle, eco home and garden expert, created a homemade toilet cleaner. "But," she says, "it proved to be much more than that. It will remove algae, dissolve rust and kill mould, clean shower screens, baths, sinks and shower heads, brass and copper, and will remove the toughest stains on laundry." Mix 200g citric acid with 150ml boiling water until clear. Stir through 20ml of eco-friendly washing-up liquid and 5–10 drops of organic essential oil (optional), cool, then pour into a 400ml spray bottle."

#### 4 Take the work out of laundry

KC Davis (Domestic Blisters on TikTok) creates hacks for people who are neurodivergent or who find it hard to look after their homes or themselves. For example, if you find laundry overwhelming, do it once a week, she says: wash everything on cold and don't bother sorting by colour. When the clothes are dry, she doesn't fold. And the world does not end.

#### 5 Make your own bug repellent

Save used coffee grounds, then spread out on a tray to dry for a few days. Shape a couple of spoonfuls of the dry grounds into a mound on a heat-safe plate or bowl, light the top and leave to smoulder (outside). The smoke smells like roasting coffee and deters wasps, flies, and mosquitoes.

#### 6 Remove stains

According to the many, many cleaning mavens of #CleaningTikTok, for machine-washable fabrics stained with mud, blood, ink, tea, or coffee, you need a bag of old-fashioned washing soda (sodium carbonate), which will set you back about £2 a kilo. Mix up a strong solution in hot water and soak for an hour or so before washing as normal. For oil stains on fabric or leather, try using baby powder.

#### 7 Clean your computer screen

Adamjan recommends using a damp teabag to clean a smudged or dusty computer screen. Dip the bag in a cup of cold water (or re-dip a used one from your morning brew), rub it all over the screen and then polish with a clean, dry cloth or paper towel. This trick also works well on mirrors.

#### 8 Freshen up the microwave

Food writer Samira Kazan says lemon is the best way to deal with a grimy, greasy or sticky microwave. Squeeze a lemon into a microwave-safe bowl and add the shell (the outer skin of the lemon). Zap for five minutes, leave to stand, door closed, for 10 minutes, and then open and wipe down.

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#### 9 Tackle bad smells

Bicarbonate of soda is an excellent neutraliser: it can remove the smell of urine (a side-effect of both pets and toddlers) from a fabric armchair. It also works on stinky shoes, rugs and carpets, says YouTuber Melissa Maker; she uses a sieve to sift it evenly over her uncovered mattress to keep it smelling fresh.

#### 10 Clean almost anything with vinegar

If your fridge really, really pongs, bicarb won't do the trick, but a good clean with vinegar will. Dilute distilled white vinegar 50:50 with water. Add a few drops of essential oil or vanilla extract if the smell of vinegar offends you (it fades quickly) and spritz then wipe everywhere inside the fridge. Use the same spray on glass and most kitchen surfaces (be careful with wood, marble, or stone) and the inside of food-waste bins. Or add a cupful to the washing machine before running it with detergent to soften laundry and brighten whites.

#### 11 Rescue burnt pans

Remove stuck or burnt food from metal pots and trays by placing on the hob over medium heat and adding boiling water. Bring to a simmer, soften the burnt bits, then scrape them off with a spatula. Cool, then wash as normal. (Adamjan uses a paste made from lemon juice, vinegar, and bicarb to scrub oven racks.)

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions in as much detail as possible.

1. What will you need to make your own plant-watering system?
2. What is the reasoning behind buying two sets of curtains?
3. What are the ingredients in Nancy's toilet cleaner?
4. What else can the toilet cleaner be used for?
5. What is KC Davis's laundry hack?
6. What can be used as a natural bug repellent?
7. What old-fashioned ingredient can remove laundry stains and bad smells? How?
8. How should you clean a computer screen?
9. What natural thing can you use to clean a greasy microwave? How?
10. What can you use for smelly things when bicarb doesn't work?

#### 4 Key language

a. Complete the verb + noun collocations from the article below.

avoid  
kill

brighten  
remove

deter  
scrub

dilute  
soften

dissolve  
squeeze

1. \_\_\_\_\_ chemicals
2. \_\_\_\_\_ mould
3. \_\_\_\_\_ algae/stains
4. \_\_\_\_\_ rust
5. \_\_\_\_\_ wasps and other insects
6. \_\_\_\_\_ a lemon
7. \_\_\_\_\_ vinegar
8. \_\_\_\_\_ laundry
9. \_\_\_\_\_ whites
10. \_\_\_\_\_ oven racks

b. Ask and answer questions using the collocations from task A.

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#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “I like my house to be spotless.”
- “I find cleaning therapeutic.”
- “I feel overwhelmed by chores.”
- “I often let the dishes or laundry pile up.”
- “I like to stay on top of my chores with the right hacks.”

#### 6 In your own words

a. You are going to share some life hacks. Choose one of the categories below. Think of something you know how to do well or would like to learn to do better. Come up with at least three hacks. Write a short text for each.

- health / fitness
- beauty / personal care
- cooking / nutrition
- cleaning / household chores
- technology / devices
- work / productivity

b. Present your hack to the rest of the class.