

High efficiency laundry detergents make clothes, environment cleaner

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So you've purchased a new washer or you're thinking about buying a new machine. The salesperson informs you that many of the new front-loading models now require high-efficiency laundry detergent. "What's that?" you ask. "Is that any different from the liquid or powder I've been using for years?"

Yes, there is one basic difference. The high-efficiency soaps do not generate the amount of suds that traditional detergents create.

Why is that important? The new washers require less water and consequently the need for large quantities of suds to clean the clothes is not as great.

So if you want to avoid a scene from a comedy routine where suds come bubbling through the door of the machine and fill your laundry room from floor to ceiling, you might want to consider the high-efficiency offerings now prevalent in the market.

The other reason to go easy on the cleaning agent is that excess soap will leave a residue on clean clothes. No one wants that.

Another added benefit is that using less detergent saves money, not to mention that it's friendlier to the environment.

Most of the leading manufacturers offer high-efficiency alternatives. They are marked with an HE label on the bottle or box and readily available in most stores. Ingredients vary according to the brand.

And so that begs the question: Are all high-efficiency laundry detergents created equal?

The answer depends on your perspective.

Seventh Generation, for one, offers plant-derived detergents with enzymes designed to rid clothes of dirt. Its low-foaming, stain-removing formula is usable in standard or conventional machines.

The company also notes on its website that the product is formulated to be safe for families and the environment as well as a non-toxic, non-irritating, hypoallergenic, biodegradable alternative to petroleum-based detergents. Many of the mainstream companies' solutions are petroleum based.



The ingredients on the Seventh Generation label are listed as Aqua (water), sodium lauryl sulfate, coceth-7 and glycerin (plant-derived cleaning agents), sodium citrate (water softener), oleic acid (plant-derived, anti-foaming agent), sodium hydroxide (alkalinity builder), sodium chloride (thickener), boric acid and calcium chloride (enzyme stabilizers), protease and amylase (enzyme soil removers), methylisothiazolinone and benzisothiazolinone (preservatives).

Other HE laundry detergents include Ecos, Ecover, Method and Meyer's. Ecover's liquid solution is compatible with the HE or standard washers. The company states that it does not use optical brighteners or animal testing. The liquid formula is gentle on the skin and may be effectively used for hand-washing clothes.





Ecos's concentrated liquid contains a coconut-based fabric softener. Only 1.5 ounces are needed for a full load, according to the company's website.

Mrs. Meyer's describes its Clean Day Laundry Detergent as containing anionic surfactants from plant-derived sources, cotton extract, Borax, enzymes and its trademark natural essential oils for a garden-fresh fragrance.

In terms of price, plant-based detergents generally cost slightly more than petroleum-based products, but the difference is an investment in the environment.

When it comes to washing clothes, these natural detergents offer high efficiency in energy consumption and resources without a deficiency in cleanliness.

