

## CHAPTER 1

# *Introducing a Super-Green Clean*

Microfiber towels can revolutionize the way we all clean house. But this technology doesn't work the way we've cleaned before; instead it uses the principles of physics instead of chemistry. Any homemaker is a pretty fair chemist and knows that "oil and water don't mix" and if you want to clean up grease or oil, you have to use a soap or detergent of some kind. That's the way we've always done it, but that isn't the way it works with microfiber towels.

Microfiber towels *do pick up oil and grease using only water* because they work in a completely different way. But to use them effectively—and be able to clean without chemicals—we have to change our ideas about cleaning. Microfiber towels look a lot like an ordinary cotton terrycloth towel, but there the resemblance ends.

I stumbled upon microfiber towels accidentally and went through a learning period. At first, they seemed to work sometimes and not others. There were no directions for how to clean house with them and I had to learn by trial and error. When I finally figured out *why* microfiber towels work, I found endless uses for them around the house. And, I realized why the house stayed cleaner longer than when I'd been using the conventional cleaning chemicals and methods.

Microfiber technology opens the door for not just a cleaner home, but a cleaner environment as well. They clean using only plain tap water, so you can eliminate many household cleaning chemicals which would otherwise end up in the air or water. They also rinse out with just water. They are reusable and washable, so they won't be adding to the landfill. They pick up extremely fine particles including soot, pollen, dander and dust, so they are a godsend for anyone battling allergies or asthma.

When they first hear about these seemingly miraculous properties, the question that everyone asks is

*“Why didn't I know about this?”*

The answer that I came to, through my own experiences, is simply that no one has written down the directions for using microfiber towels for house cleaning. This book is really just a beginning guide to help de-mystify microfiber towels. Even though they seem to do the impossible, they aren't “magic.”

These towels have been around for quite a few years in computer “clean rooms” and auto detailers have been using them (and raving about them) for cleaning and polishing their prized automobiles. You won't find microfiber towels (yet) in the cleaning aisle at the supermarket, but you can buy them at any auto parts store. Isn't that crazy?

In just a few years, these towels will be part of everyone's regular house cleaning supplies. After only a couple of weeks, I simply couldn't imagine not having them. There will come a day when the younger generation asks, “But, Grandma, how did you ever clean house without microfiber towels?”

## CHAPTER 2

### *Diary of a Convert*

I didn't mean to start a revolution—I was just getting my snow tires changed and had a half-hour to kill. I wandered around the showroom, assessing the unlikelihood of fancy hubcaps on the minivan. One small display caught my attention. On it were some blue terry cloth towels labeled “the car detailers best friend.”

OK, it was something to read. “Microfiber,” the label read, “Fast, Easy, Amazing” (uh huh, I've heard that before). But as I read farther: “No Harmful Chemicals, Non-Abrasive...Use on Any Surface...Wash and Reuse 100's of Times.”

“Well,” I thought, “This could be interesting,” and took the package up to the desk to see if I could find out more.

“How much are these?” I asked the gal tending to us pesky customers.

“I don't know,” she replied. “I'll have to ask.” Obviously, they didn't sell too many of them.

After a few minutes, she returned with the news that the package was fifteen dollars. Yikes, fifteen dollars for just three small towels? Indeed.

I'd started to turn around and take the package back to the display, but being polite, decided to ask, "Have you ever used these?"

"No, I haven't," she replied, "but Tom has." She gestured to a very large, dark-haired man about 30 years old. "This lady is asking about the towels," she explained.

"They are great!" Tom said. "Absolutely great. They get everything clean!"

What? A man raving about a cleaning product? That shocked me. I took another look at the package. "Absorbs Seven Times Its Weight," "Machine Wash and Dry." Hmm.

Well, I brought those towels home and in the afternoon decided to give them a try. The directions were pretty sketchy, but a dust cloth is a dust cloth, isn't it?

(Let me explain here that we live in the country and the county road isn't paved. That means that all summer, every car passing by raises a huge cloud of dust, which drifts over the house. Our local dust is as fine as flour, courtesy of Mt. St. Helen's ash a few years back, and it gets into the house through every nook, cranny, door and window. It also gets tracked in on every boot, tennis shoe and paw. We don't just have dust, we have DUST! It isn't your genteel city dust that waits a week for a house cleaning. It is dust of geologic proportions!)

So, there I was, new dust cloth in hand and re-reading the directions. "For light dusting, use dry." I'd set the cloth on top of the television set (which attracts so much dust that the picture is obscured in a day). When I picked the cloth back up, THERE WAS A CLEAN SPOT!

I'm glad no one was around because I'm pretty sure I stood there just staring at that clean spot long enough that anyone would have begun to wonder—and then I'd have had to explain myself. But I'd never seen any cleaning product work like that. In the little place that the towel had only touched, there just wasn't any dust, it was all stuck to the rag, er, towel. It had begun to dawn on me that this cloth just might be something that deserved respect.

After dusting the television, I moved to the bookshelves, which never get the attention they need until the tops of the books begin to look furry. The cloth worked fabulously. It got dirtier and dirtier while the books got cleaner and cleaner. In fact the books looked cleaner than they had in years. The towel was even picking up the dust from the little creases in the binding and along the edges of the pages.

By this time, I was pretty impressed. I'd used the disposable dusting cloths, but they had never gotten the books as clean as this towel. The towel, however, was looking filthy. I stepped outside to give the cloth a good shaking to get rid of the dust, expecting clouds of our flour-fine dust to fly. Snap! Nothing. Snap again. Still no dust flying. The cloth wouldn't let go of it. Oh great.

So back to the label I went. "To Clean Towel: Machine Wash and Dry." Nuts. I was just getting going. I left the towel on the counter and took the second one out of the bag. The whole living room had gotten dusted faster than ever before and I was ready to tackle the office next. As I worked along, I began to wonder whether I couldn't rinse the dust off the towel instead.

I retrieved filthy towel number one and ran cold water from the kitchen faucet. It took a while to get wet, but the dirt seemed to be washing off. When the towel was soaked through, I wrung it out like a dishcloth. A lot of muddy water went down the drain. The cloth looked cleaner, but not clean. So I tried it again. Better.

Now I had a damp cloth and thought I'd try that. In the living room, I wiped it along the wood wall—clean! Then the painted wall—clean! This was unbelievable. I was getting excited. I tried the woodwork, various pieces of furniture, tables, anything that caught my eye. The damp cloth really left things clean and I hadn't used anything but this magic cloth and water.

In the kitchen with a really dirty cloth, I ran a basin of cold water this time to see what would happen if I swished the cloth around in it. Instant mud. The cloth had let loose of most of the dirt. I drained the sink and refilled it. This time I just dunked the towel, up and down, in and out of the water. With each dunking,

the towel released more dirt. This was great. I didn't have to stop. The towel cleaned up with just water.

With each item I cleaned, I was more and more impressed—and I was gaining confidence. I took a clean, damp towel outdoors and called my husband. “Just watch this!” With that one cloth, I washed every one of the dirty windows on my minivan. Even he had to admit I had reason to be babbling, because babbling I was. When I finally stopped for a minute, I asked him, “I sound like an infomercial, don't I?”

He laughed.

By the next morning, I was wondering what else the magic towel was good for and decided to try the internet for cleaning information. Quite a few sites came up with information about microfiber towels—for car cleaning, hair drying and lens cleaning—but nothing for general house cleaning. That was surprising. I was a little hesitant to use it before I really knew what it was good for and what it *shouldn't* be used for.

On the car maintenance web sites, most of the information was very general. The microfiber towels were touted as being able to clean everything on the interior of a car. Everything? Well, that's what they said, *including grease and oil*.

Only one mention on one of the websites indicated that I wasn't a lone convert. The car cleaning cloths had been tested by men and given a glowing recommendation. As an afterthought, the writer mentioned that he had taken one of the cloths home to his wife and she “just raved.”

That wasn't much to go on, but I reasoned that there were a lot of different kinds of surfaces in a car—metal, fabric, vinyl, enamel, plastic, cloth, glass, etc. I just figured I'd try the cloth on different things and see how it worked. Over the next few days, I really gave the towel a tryout and it cleaned miraculously sometimes, but not others, and I couldn't figure out why. Slowly, I learned that I had been trying to “help” the towels by using them with cleaners or too much water. In other words, I'd been using it just like any regular cleaning cloth, but the microfiber towels worked on a completely

different principle than anything else. Once I figured out what that principle was, I could clean nearly anything: from the greasy stovetop to windows, floors, walls, furniture, etc. Over and over, I was amazed at what a microfiber towel could do with just water. And, over and over, I kept asking myself: “*Why didn’t I know about these things?*”

I will admit to some very uncharitable thoughts about the large companies that sell thousands of cleaning products and chemicals each year. I suspected that they were holding out on us, since if everyone started using microfiber towels, they wouldn’t sell nearly as much. After my own experiences, though, I changed my mind. I’ve come to realize that the microfiber towels work so differently than convention cleaning, that even experts in home economics wouldn’t know the “how” or “why” of the towels. They would probably do just what I did initially, trying to combine the old way of cleaning with this new product and getting unreliable results. The big companies probably *had* tested these towels and didn’t think they were any improvement—or not enough of an improvement—to put on the market for the homemaker.

## CHAPTER 4

# *Buying the Right Microfiber Towel for Cleaning House*

**M**icrofibers are being made of acrylic, nylon, rayon and polyester in various weaves and qualities for very specialized jobs. With so many choices, it would be easy to end up with a towel that doesn't really work well for housecleaning. So, when you go looking for a magic towel of your own, these are the things to note:

- The towel should be made of polyester (75% to 80%) and polyamide (20% to 25%). The polyester forms the wedges at the edges for scrubbing and the polyamide (nylon) is in the center and absorbs water. The first towels I used were 75% polyester and 25% polyamide, but as long as the blend is within the range above, they will do fine for cleaning house.
- The towel should be made of *split microfibers* and say so on the label. There are cheap towels that look similar, but the fibers aren't split, so they just won't work for cleaning fine particles. Expect to pay around \$5.00 or \$6.00 per towel.

- The towel should look like a fine grade of terry cloth on at least one side. The ones I've used look like terry cloth on both sides, but have a little shorter nap on one side. Don't get a waffle weave towel for cleaning. They are for drying things. Avoid towels with long loops in the terry cloth since the thicker towels can't be really wrung out.
- The towel should have a bound or sewn edge that feels soft. Poor quality towels have coarse (rough) threads or a hard cut edge. The auto detailers have to worry about microscopic scratches on their expensive paint jobs, so some manufacturers are making "edgeless" cloths or ones with rounded corners. Those specialty cloths are more expensive, and those features just don't matter for general house cleaning. But, if you are cleaning a delicate, antique porcelain figurine, for example, then it would probably be worth the extra expense for a special towel.
- The towel should have a fiber count of 90,000 or more but a higher count doesn't necessarily mean a better quality or better cleaning ability. The structure of the fiber and the weave are more important. Microfiber towels aren't judged like bed sheets where the higher the thread count the better, but it does make a difference if the count is lower than 90,000 or the terry loops look sparse or uneven.
- The towel should be labeled as able to absorb 7 to 9 times its own weight and should feel soft to the touch. A good microfiber towel will feel a little weird when you first handle one. Even dry, the electrostatic attraction of the fibers will make it feel "clingy"—as if it wants to hold onto your skin and cling to itself.
- Some microfiber towels are labeled "lint free." That basically means that they were treated at the factory to remove the lint that collected during manufacturing. It doesn't mean that they won't shed lint—microfiber towels won't do that anyway. I've tried both types, and they work exactly the same for cleaning. The only difference is that the first time you rinse a towel that isn't lint free, the rinse water will look milky as the towel is releasing the lint on its surface.

That seems like a lot to remember, but if you're at an auto supply store, look for the general purpose cleaning towels for auto detailing. At the back of the book are some of the suppliers that I found on the internet and I'm sure there are more. At every automobile-related business that we've checked, there are microfiber towels available.

As of this writing, a good cleaning towel is \$5.00 to \$6.00 from reliable suppliers. Towels are offered individually, but the 3-packs or 5-packs are a better buy and you'll want more than one towel. It didn't take long for me to find out that one towel should live in the office, one in the kitchen and one in the car.

Microfiber towels are offered in a variety of sizes, but I found the 16-inch square size practical for just about everything. You don't want a towel that is so large that it is a problem to wring out.

There are cheap, poor quality towels showing up at flea markets, big box discount stores and internet auctions. Be cautious of those, even when they are labeled "microfiber" and/or "top quality" if they don't give the important details above. The worst part of the cheap towels is that their fibers aren't even split into the star pattern (which costs money to do, of course). Instead their microfibers are round and just don't pick up the dirt, grime and fine particles like the good towels do. I can just hear someone saying "I tried cleaning with a microfiber towel and it didn't do any better than my regular cloth." Not everything that says "microfiber" on it is a good cleaning cloth.

If you're put off by the idea of spending \$5.00 or \$6.00 for a cloth, do the same sort of calculation that I did. Look at how much you have spent for paper towels, disposable dusting cloths, glass cleaners and surface cleaners in the last month. Just in the last month. Remember that a good microfiber towel can be rinsed and reused over and over again—and do the same cleaning job better. Then add in the environmental costs of the paper towels and plastic cleaner bottles as they fill up landfills. Finally, look at the labels on the cleaning products you use around the house. Those chemicals end up in our air and water.

If you have children with allergies or asthma, you don't even have to go through that calculation. I found one website which mentioned how good microfiber towels were at picking up dust and pollen and recommended them for preventing allergies (but they didn't include any instructions for using them). In the meantime, \$5.00 is unbelievably cheap to anyone who needs help fighting the allergy battle.

One more point that I have to bring up is that I found two references to a study which reportedly revealed that wiping down surfaces with a damp microfiber towel removed more than 99% of the surface bacteria. No one seems to be able to cite the source for that claim, but a good quality microfiber towel works with extremely small particles—even smaller than a bacterium—and once I figured out the physics of why microfibers work, it was obvious that they would pick up bacteria. I tested the rinse water myself and sure enough, there were lots of bacteria. What I couldn't test was how clean the surface was. I'm sure there will be lots of studies before too long, but when you really need to fight germs, you can add disinfectant to the water that you rinse the towel in for extra insurance.