

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Spotless

Shannon Lush & Jennifer Fleming

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SPOTLES

Room-by-room
solutions to
domestic
disasters

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Jennifer Fleming





Introduction

Have you ever accidentally put a jumper in the washing machine and found it will now only fit a twelve-year-old? I have. Do you know what to do if you burn a pan, aside from chucking it out? I do. What do you do if your lovable pooch has a mishap on your white wool carpet? I know.

The good news is that there are solutions to these and many other problems that occur in and around the home, and this book will show you how to fix them. It also offers guidance on the correct way to do all those things you're not really quite sure how to do. Things like how to vacuum properly, how to organise your wardrobe, and the best way to wash dishes.

This book will also give you the confidence to walk past those expensive cleaning products in the supermarket. Because we know less and less about cleaning, advertisers can play on our fears of not being quite clean or hygienic enough. We will buy an overpriced product that promises instant cleaning because we think it could rescue us from becoming a social pariah. Well, there's no need to be seduced any longer. You will learn to love bicarbonate of soda. Vinegar won't just be part of a salad dressing. And here's something you won't hear about in one of those gleaming-white ads on TV: the best cleaners are water and sunshine.

This book is a room-by-room guide to your house. There's information on how to care for and fix just about anything that can go wrong in each room. The advice is set out like a cookbook so you can see which 'ingredients' or cleaning products you'll need before following the 'recipe' or cleaning process. You'll also find real-life questions from people who've called me when I've appeared on the radio. If you have a problem that isn't covered in this book, contact me through my website: www.shannonlush.com.

There are a couple of tricks with stain removal. Firstly, don't panic and put something on the stain that could make it worse. Work out what's in the stain. Then work out what

the solvent is. If there are several components to the stain, you must remove the protein part first, then fats, then any chemical or biological dyes, and then any resins or glues. The way to work this out is to remember that proteins are anything animal-or seed-based, fats are greasy between your fingers, and resins and glues are not water-soluble. If you're not sure, clean with cold water first, then use hot water, then any solvents.

You'll read a lot about 'blood-heat water' in the book. This is lukewarm or warm water. The way to test the temperature is to put the water on your wrist; if you can't feel it – if it's not too hot or too cold – it's blood heat.

When using vinegar, you'll get a better result if you use cider vinegar on hard surfaces and white vinegar on fabrics or white marble.

Dry-cleaning fluid is the same thing as white spirits or *Murlex*, which is a brand of dry-cleaning fluid.

When you come across the two-sponge method for bicarb and vinegar, it means that you dip one damp sponge in bicarb and another in vinegar, then lay the vinegar sponge over the top of the bicarb sponge and squeeze the two together as you clean. As an alternative, if you're working with an intricate surface, make a paste of bicarb and water to the consistency of soft butter. Paint it over the surface with a cloth, leave it to dry and then polish off with a rag dipped in vinegar.

And if you're feeling disheartened while cleaning or tackling that stubborn stain that just won't shift, just think about the Exxon Valdez disaster when thousands of litres of oil spilled into an Alaskan harbour. Your disaster will never be as bad!

SHANNON'S STORY

ONE OF MY earliest memories is of my grandmother coming over to help Mum clean the house. I would watch as brass and silver were polished and stains were removed. The house would be filled with the smell of beeswax. Even now, when I open a tub of *Gumption*, I'm reminded of my grandma.

My mother trained as a tailor and taught me to sew. She's absolutely brilliant with a needle and sewing machine and is such a great cleaner that the family refers to her as 'the white tornado'. My father was an engineer, artist, builder and inventor and knew a great deal about chemicals. He always explained what something was, why it worked and how chemicals react with each other. I think learning that kind of information at such a young age made it instinctive for me.

As a child, I loved anything creative. I loved using coloured pencils, painting and sewing. At the age of eight, I sold my artwork to school classmates so they could enter art competitions! Sewing classes at primary school were taught by Mrs Roberts, who was from the old school and stiff as a ramrod. Before each class, you had to wash your hands and anyone with sweaty palms had to pat their hands with talcum powder. Everything was done by hand; every seam had to be backed. I learned how to do fairy stitches, embroidery and petit point. At the time, we all thought Mrs Roberts was a dragon but her attention to detail and craft was an invaluable example to me.

I turned these skills into a living when I was a teenager and embroidering denim was popular. I also set up stalls outside rock concerts and painted people's faces. Then I

got a job in the rag trade which taught me about the line and hang of fabric. I became a lot faster at sewing and sold things at markets. I learned every craft that I could: ceramics, glass, leadlighting, painting, sculpture, working with metals and making jewellery.

The move into ceramics opened up a whole new area for me. After winning several awards at competitions, I set up a makeshift shop at the bottom of my sister's house. One day, a woman came in with damaged ceramic and asked if I could repair it. I did some research, managed to fix the piece and the woman was so thrilled she sent her friends along.

This led me into the world of restoration. I spoke with other restorers and studied for some time with a very knowledgeable man who was in his eighties by that time. It was a perfect melding of my artistic skills and my love of antiques and decorative art. When I look at anything antique, I see the tracks of all the hands that have moved over it. And my father's early teaching about chemicals also helped, because restoration often involves breaking something down before rebuilding it.

I've always loved books on handy hints, particularly old ones. My great-aunt Letitia kept a notebook with hints, proverbs, quotations for women, recipes and jokes, which was a wonderful resource. I developed an active interest in stain removal after marking things with paints because, when I'm painting, I make a serious mess. There were plenty of phone calls to my mother for advice. I also test any handy hint I come across. No matter what it is, I'll give it a go.

This book is a collection of that knowledge.

JENNIFER'S STORY

I'M PART OF the generation that rings Mum for advice on how to fix any spills or stains around the house. And I'm very lucky to have a mum who knows what to do. That's why most of my friends didn't believe me when I told them I was writing a book on household hints. It's not that my house is dirty. They just knew I had very little knowledge in this area. Now, they can't shut me up.

When I was growing up, Mum did show me how to wash up, hang out the washing and iron, but I rarely use those skills today. I take the phrase 'wash and wear' literally. For many years I've paid someone to clean the house, as much for domestic harmony as anything else. All the knowledge in this book is Shannon's. I'm just the absorber and writer of the book.

This book came about through James Valentine and his radio programme on 702 ABC Sydney. He heard the advice that spiders are deterred by lemons, which reminded him of all those old-fashioned handy hints. He asked listeners to ring in if they were having problems fixing a spill or stain around the house and then invited other listeners to give their solutions. One day Shannon rang in and answered every question. She became a regular guest on the programme and has been helping listeners ever since.

I produce James' show and many listeners would ring and ask, 'Does Shannon have a book?' Well, here it is!

USEFUL INGREDIENTS

0000 steel wool	is a very fine grade steel wool. Available from hardware shops.
Acetone	is a volatile, flammable ketone. It's used as a solvent for resins, primers, nail polish and heavy plastics. It's available from chemists and hardware shops.
Beeswax	is the wax produced by bees when making honeycomb. It's a great polishing agent.
Bicarb (sodium bicarbonate)	is a salt and an alkaline. It's also known as bicarbonate. Bicarb neutralises acid. During this process it releases carbon dioxide and water which is great for penetrating stains or dissolving grease. It's available at the supermarket, generally in the cake baking rather than cleaning aisle, and at chemists.
Bleach	is a whitening agent.
Borax	is a crystalline sodium borate. It is a fungicide, insecticide and detergent booster. It is mildly toxic and should be applied with care. Avoid contact with skin and avoid ingesting it. It's available from chemists and some supermarkets.
Camphor	is a ketone from the camphor laurel tree. It has a strong vapour which most insects, particularly moths, and cats don't like. It makes a great protector of gardens and

wardrobes. It's very flammable so never heat it.

Carpet cleaner	comes in many varieties. They can be soap-based, bicarb-based, detergent-based or alcohol-based.
Chamois block	a fine-grade cleaning block that is a very absorbent sponge which removes moisture from carpet and other surfaces. Punch make one. There's an Australian product called Slurpex available at www.slurpex.com.au .
Cloves	are a spice. They come from the dried flower bud of the clove tree. Oil can be extracted from them and used to inhibit mould.
Cornflour	is a starch of maize, rice and other grains. It's absorbent and a very fine abrasive.
Creosote	is a liquid, oily wood tar distillation used as a preservative and antiseptic. Available from hardware shops.
Descaler	removes limescale and calcium deposits from kettles, coffee machines, steam irons, shower heads, toilets and sinks. It's available in various forms from the supermarket or hardware shops.
Dry-cleaning fluid	is a mixture of petroleum hydrocarbons. It's a solvent and also known as white spirits.
Epsom salts	are hydrated magnesium sulphate and named because they were found at Epsom in Surrey. They are good as a bath soaker and for unshrinking jumpers and other woollens.

Eucalyptus oil	is an essential oil distilled from the leaves of certain eucalyptus trees. It's a paint stripper, adhesive solvent and also releases vapours. Unlike most oils, it mixes with water. It's available at the supermarket or chemists.
Fuller's Earth	is high calcium clay with a bleaching agent. It's very absorbent. It acts as a wool relaxant and is used to unshrink or shrink woollens. It's available from chemists.
Goanna oil	is an oil made from goanna fat. It's used as a lubricant and liniment. It's available from chemists.
Glycerine	is an odourless, clear liquid. It's used as an agent in cosmetics, toothpaste and shampoos and is soluble in both water and alcohol. Glycerine helps loosen stains. It's available from chemists.
Gumption	is a greyish cleaning paste which has many uses. It's great for cleaning the bath and kitchen sink. It contains a mild bleaching agent and abrasive. It's available from the supermarket.
Hydrogen peroxide	is an oxidising liquid used as an antiseptic and bleaching agent.
Lavender oil	is derived from lavender flowers and has many uses including insect repellent, dog inhibitor or air freshener. Buy it at the supermarket, chemists or health food stores.
Leather dew	is a combination of soap and oil and used to treat leather. It's available from shoe repair shops.
Lemon oil	comes from the oil in a lemon peel and is

used as a furniture polish, spider and insect inhibitor and stain remover.

Methylated spirits is a raw alcohol with menthol. The menthol gives it a strong smell and taste so it isn't mistaken for water. It's a solvent for paints.

Oil of cloves is cold-pressed oil from the dried flower bud of the clove tree. It's useful as a mould inhibitor, insecticide, toothache soother and an ingredient in cooking. It's available from chemists.

Oil of pennyroyal is oil from a small-leaved mint. It's useful in deterring moths and fleas, **but is harmful to pregnant women and shouldn't be used by them or near them or in large quantities.**

Plaster of paris is a white powder made of calcium sulphate. It forms a paste when mixed with water and can be shaped before setting. It's also absorbent and good for removing stains from granite. It's available from art supply shops or hardware shops.

Rotten milk is formed by leaving milk in the sun until it forms into solids. The time taken to rot varies according to the weather and age of the milk. Rotten milk is great for removing inks.

Shellac is a varnish made of a resinous substance secreted through the pores of the carapace of the *Coccus lacca* scale insect. This substance is then dissolved in alcohol or a similar solvent. It's used for making varnish, polish and sealing wax.

Sugar soap	is a highly caustic soap. It comes in powder or liquid form. The powder form has a mild abrasive.
Sweet almond oil	is the oil from almond nuts. It's useful for cleaning bone and ivory. Available from supermarkets and chemists.
Talcum powder	is ground from a soft greenish-grey mineral. It's a super fine abrasive, lubricant and is also very absorbent.
Tea-tree oil	is an oil extracted from a tea-tree bush. It's used as an antibacterial and mixes with water.
Turpentine	is a volatile oil and resin distilled from trees. It's a solvent for oil-based paints.
Unibond PVA	is a PVA wood glue and sealant. It's available from hardware shops.
Vanilla essence	is extracted from vanilla beans. It is combined with alcohol and provides fragrance and flavour to food. Also a deodoriser. Available from supermarkets.
Vinegar	is an acid. It's a preservative, condiment, beverage and for our purposes, cleaner and sanitiser. Cider vinegar is best on hard surfaces and white vinegar is better on fabrics and white marble. It's available from supermarkets.
Wet-and-dry	is a very fine (2000 grade) abrasive paper. Available from paint supply and car accessory shops.
Whiting	is a powder used in cleaning and polishing glass. The powder removes excess oil and

putty from leadlight panels. It's available from leadlight shops.

Witch-hazel is extracted from the bark and leaves of a shrub, *Hamamelis virginiana* : witch-hazel or spotted alder. Used as a soothing and mildly astringent and lotion. Available from supermarkets and chemists.

Woolwash is a mild soap combined with eucalyptus oil and bicarb soda or detergent. As the name suggests, it's useful in washing woollens. Buy it from the supermarket.

WD-40 stands for Water Displacement, 40th attempt. It's a high-grade penetrating oil and stops corrosion.

Wheat Bran is the ground husk of wheat or other grain. It's absorbent and a scourer and good for cleaning fabrics and furs.







The kitchen is the centre of the home.

It's the room we gravitate to, particularly when we're hungry. Food is stored here, prepared here, served here and often eaten here. It's where the dirty plates and cutlery return, and where scraps and rubbish are dealt with. It's a zone of constant cleaning but also the space for creative culinary expression. Keep it clean and hygienic because it's never a good idea to poison your guests or the children!

A HOT POT ON LAMINATE: JOHN'S STORY

Incident: 'I'm living in a rental property at the moment that has a very 1970s yellow laminate worktop. And I don't know how, but I managed to put a hot pot on the laminate and it's left a scald mark. I've tried all the usual cleaners and nothing has worked. How can I fix it so I get my deposit back?'

Solution: What to do will depend on how deep the burn is. Either way, warm the laminate first with a cloth that's been run under hot water, then wrung out and placed over the affected area. If it's a shallow burn, put dry-cleaning fluid on a cotton wool ball and rub it over the scald. Then rinse it off with a damp cloth. If the scald is deep, put dry-cleaning fluid onto a cotton wool ball, add a dab of *Gumption* and apply the mixture to the scald. Then rinse it off with a damp cloth. If the burn is really bad, you may have to replace a section of the laminate and you'll need a restorer or other professional to help with this.

OVEN

I can still picture my grandmother cleaning the oven. She used to wrap a tea towel over her face in an attempt to block the fumes created by the cleaning agent, caustic soda. It used to stink the kitchen out for a couple of hours. Methods aren't as drastic now, though I prefer to use bicarb and vinegar to clean the oven rather than proprietary products.

Be careful when cleaning ovens because most are made of enamel and steel. Enamel is essentially very tough glass fired onto a steel base and will scratch if you use abrasives

and scourers. If you can, wipe the oven every time you use it and clean it properly every couple of uses. Just make sure it's cool enough that you don't burn yourself! Remove the oven racks, rack supports, element and light cover and sprinkle the surface with bicarb, then splash some vinegar over the top. There will be a fizzing when the two come into contact. Scrub with a sponge or nylon brush as soon as this happens. To clean the sides of the oven, use one damp sponge dipped in bicarb, and another sponge dipped in vinegar. Apply the bicarb sponge first, then place the vinegar sponge over the top of the bicarb sponge and press the vinegar through both sponges. Once you've cleaned, rinse with water. If there are stubborn stains or burns, reapply the bicarb and vinegar several times and use a nylon brush to scrub. In order to see what you're cleaning on the oven roof, place a small mirror on the bottom of the oven.

Clean all the bits you removed with bicarb and vinegar. Let them stand before washing in the sink with detergent and water.

If you inherit a very scratched oven, sand it gently with damp 2000-grade wet-and-dry or have it re-enamelled.

Q: 'I've got a huge scorch mark on the oven glass,' says Natalie. 'Is there anything I can do?'

Problem:	Scorch marks on the oven glass.
What to use:	Bicarb, vinegar, nylon brush.
How to apply:	Sprinkle bicarb onto the scorch mark at about the same thickness as you would sprinkle icing sugar onto the top of a cake. Then splash it with an equal amount of vinegar. While it's fizzing, rub it with a nylon brush, then rinse. You may need to repeat this several times.

GRILL

A grill is really just a small oven and should be cleaned the same way. For day-to-day cleaning, take the removable parts of the grill out and wash with detergent and water. Most stains should come off. For any stubborn stains, use bicarb and vinegar as described for the oven.

HOB AND SPLASHBACK

I almost burned the house down when I was fourteen. It was just like that ad on TV when the woman leaves some chips cooking on the hob while she answers the phone. The pan ignites in flames and she exclaims, 'Oh my goodness, the chips!' It was a bit like that with me. I was making chips and answered the door. I was only gone for about two minutes and in that time the plastic on the extractor fan was in flames and the wiring in the brick wall was also alight. Never leave a frying pan cooking!

Wipe the area every time you use it with either bicarb and vinegar or hot water and detergent. Gas jets should be removed and cleaned in water and detergent. Don't use a scourer because it will scratch the surface. Make sure all the jets are clear before putting them back.

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| Problem: | Smoke marks on splashback. |
| What to use: | Ash, bicarb, vinegar, cloth. |
| How to apply: | Use ash from a cigarette or from the fireplace. You need enough ash to make a thin covering over the smoke mark. Rub the ash over the mark and then clean it off with bicarb and vinegar on a cloth. |
| Problem: | Scratches on the splashback. |
| What to use: | Bicarb, sponge, vinegar, or whiting, |

cloth.

How to apply: Put bicarb on a sponge and wipe it over the scratch, then wipe over it with a sponge soaked in vinegar. If this doesn't work, use a chalk product called whiting, which is available at leadlight stores. Sprinkle whiting over the scratch as though you're icing a cake and rub the area with a damp cloth.

Problem: Candle wax on hob.

What to use: Ice cube, flat-bladed knife or plastic/wooden spatula, detergent, cloth or old stockings.

How to apply: Chill the wax by placing ice on it, then scrape as much of it away as possible with a flat-bladed knife. If you're removing wax from an enamel hob, use a plastic or wooden spatula. Then mix cold water and detergent on a cloth to remove any remaining wax. You must use cold water because hot water will soften the wax, spread it and make it harder to remove. If it's really hard to get off, rub the wax with an old pair of stockings or pantyhose. If you are melting candle wax on the hob, use a double boiler and always heat and stir slowly.

Problem: Chocolate on the hob.

What to use: Hairdryer, wet cloth.

How to apply: Always use a double boiler if you're cooking chocolate on the hob. Burnt chocolate sets like cement and can only be removed with a hairdryer and wet cloth. Lay the wet cloth over the chocolate. Then hold up one edge of the cloth and apply the hairdryer so that the chocolate melts into the cloth. I learned this trick when I was training to be a chocolate chef and had

plenty of spillages. It also turned me off the smell of chocolate for years.

COOKER HOOD AND EXTRACTOR FAN

If you think about all the fumes and particles sucked up by the cooker hood, it's no wonder it needs to be cleaned. Most modern cooker hoods have stainless steel filters that can be put in the dishwasher or scrubbed in the sink with detergent and a nylon brush. Use bicarb and vinegar if the build-up is really stubborn. Charcoal filters should be washed backwards—that is, where the smoke comes out—and need to be replaced from time to time. Check the manufacturer's instructions. Using the extractor fan is the best way to minimise stains on cupboards and odours in your house. The cupboard above the oven always ends up greasy. Store canned goods here instead of plates or glasses that need to be washed to get all the grease off. And don't leave boxed goods here because heat and grease affect cardboard and can penetrate the packaging.

POTS AND PANS

Pots and pans can be made of stainless steel, aluminium, teflon, enamel, copper, cast iron, tin or glass. The best way to wash them is with detergent and water. Don't put pots and pans in the dishwasher if the handle is wooden, plastic or bakelite because it will fade and crack. Stains will come off more easily if you put a small amount of water and a drop of vinegar in your pots straight after using them.

If you have cast-iron pots, never put them in the dishwasher because they will rust. Instead, wash them by hand and dry them in the oven. Set the oven on its lowest temperature and allow it to warm, then turn it off and leave

the cast-iron pot inside until it dries. Re-season cast iron with a little olive oil rubbed around the base with a paper towel, then let it heat through on the stove for a couple of minutes before wiping again with the same paper towel.

I have a very strong grip so I'm always breaking the plastic handle on lids. And there's nothing trickier than trying to remove a hot lid without a handle. An easy replacement is a brass or ceramic cupboard doorknob with a screw-and-nut back.

Q: 'I cook everything in my old wok,' says Graeme. 'It's got to the point that if I can't cook something in the wok, I won't eat it! But it's accumulated all this build-up which, despite some concerted scrubbing on my behalf, just won't shift. Is there anything I can do?'

Problem: **Burnt pan.**

What to use: **Bicarb, vinegar, nylon brush.**

How to apply: Sprinkle bicarb into the pan then sprinkle vinegar over it. This will make it fizz. Scrub with a nylon brush while it's fizzing. You may need to repeat this two or three times for bad burns.

Problem: **Egg stains in the pan.**

What to use: **Rubber gloves, eggshell, aluminium foil, vinegar.**

How to apply: Put on rubber gloves. Then place half an eggshell together with a strip of aluminium foil and 240 ml of vinegar into the stained saucepan. Leave for half an hour and the egg stain will wipe off. The reason this works is that the calcium in the eggshell leaves a chalky deposit that absorbs the egg. I learned this from Great-aunt Letitia's wonderful notebook.