



How Do I Know It's Really "Green"? Avoid Greenwashing And Find The Best Eco-Friendly Products On The Market

February 8, 2011

From laundry detergent made of flowers to foods fried in organic oils, going green has become quite the trend over the past several years. While going green is great, it can also be risky to consumers who are serious about finding the best green products out there. You've probably heard the term "greenwashing," which means [...]



From laundry detergent made of flowers to foods fried in organic oils, going green has become quite the trend over the past several years. While going green is great, it can also be risky to consumers who are serious about finding the best green products out there. You've probably heard the term "greenwashing," which means a company is basically using the green campaign as a way to promote their business and improve their image. These products may contain "natural" materials such as vegetable oil, but that doesn't mean they don't also contain

harmful, synthetic, man-made or petroleum based products as well. Sticking one natural ingredient into a floor cleaner doesn't make it green, and this is the most common risk nowadays that the environmentally conscious woman faces while looking for [eco friendly products](#).

How to Spot Greenwashing

Fortunately, there are all sorts of red flags out there for you if you're trying to avoid greenwashing and find eco friendly products that really are all natural and truly 'green'. Whether you're trying to find the most natural floor cleaner or a hemp bag that will stay together, there are signs you can look for that will quickly help you determine whether or not a product truly is green or whether it's simply trying to get on the bandwagon.

- **Packaging cues** – As part of the green effort, many companies are opting out of using bright, attractive packaging and going with a more natural look in order to make customers think they are getting a more organic version of a product. Just because hand soap now comes in a clear bottle with yellow writing and a leaf symbol saying "organic" on it doesn't mean it really has

changed all its ingredients and turned into a natural product. Terms like “made from plants proved to improve your laundry!” could be true, even if the product only has 1/2 ounce of vegetable oil to the slew of chemicals already making it up. Read the ingredients and see how far down any sort of plant-based product is on the list. If it’s the 14th ingredient and you can’t even pronounce the other ingredients, you’ve been a victim of greenwashing.

- **Vague green related terms** – Companies will find any way for them to use words like “eco” or “green” on the packaging on order to quickly get a customer’s attention and make them feel as if they’re choosing an earth-friendly product. Vague terms like this can be used if the packaging is simply able to be recycled after using it. It doesn’t mean the packaging is made from recycled materials and it doesn’t mean it’s made of natural ingredients. Look for more specific words. “100% natural” is a much better claim, as numbers are paid close attention to by governmental agencies, and something that is completely natural should clearly be made by all natural materials. “100% post consumer materials” also means the packaging is made completely out of recycled products. The more specific the green claims are, the greener the product is.
- **No information available** – Many companies will claim their products are “green” but have nothing more to say about it. Saying a product is “green” or “eco-friendly” means nothing if there is no explanation behind what makes it that way. True

eco-friendly products – namely, products that have taken time into going more natural – will have information available either right on the packaging, or even in package insert materials or on the website. It benefits to do a little research like this before purchasing a product. If a company uses these terms but takes no time, not even a few sentences on the packaging, to explain their green efforts, they are greenwashing you.

Other Ways to Make Your Shopping Eco-Friendly

Those are some of the simplest tricks to look out for to avoid being scammed by someone who claims to be green or eco-friendly when they really are not. While you should definitely avoid all the pretty packaging marketing ploys and the vague terminology, you should also look for these signs and take these steps to help minimize your environmental damage.

- **Trust your instincts** – If a company or product has all sorts of green claims out there, the last thing you want to do is simply fall for the marketing ploy. Pretty products, smiling children’s faces and claims about stopping global warming are all used in marketing schemes to draw consumers in emotionally and encourage them to buy their product in order to help rescue the environment. The last thing you want to do is choose a product because their advertising pulled you in. Reading labels and ingredients is still important, even if the company makes some of the strongest claims you’ve ever heard.

- **Buy in bulk quantities** – Buying bulk sizes of laundry detergent, dish soap and other frequently used items helps to cut down significantly on the amount of packaging you are purchasing and throwing away. One bulk laundry detergent bottle can consist of as many as 5 individual bottles, so buying the large size cuts down on packaging materials quite significantly. Plus, buying in bulk often saves you money in the long run, even if you're spending more up front.
- **Look for certification on product labels** – Specific certifications are an easy way to help you quickly determine whether or not a "green" product is worth looking into. Trustworthy certifications include the Energy Star logo on light bulbs and electronics, Green Seal or EcoLogo on cleaning products, the USDA Organic Seal on food and cosmetic products, as well as the Forest Stewardship Council logo on paper and wood products. These logos are the most reputable and legitimate out there, and if a product has none of them but still claims to be "green," it may be a good idea to read ingredients and do more research on whether or not the product is as safe as it claims.
- **Do your homework** – Doing research is not always the most time-saving way of finding organic and natural products, but if you do have the time, it is beneficial to check websites like Consumer Reports to find green and organic products and find out if they are reputable and a good choice. Consumer Reports puts out information about eco-friendly and [green products](#) on their [Greener](#)

[Choices](#) site. These sites are easy to look through to find out the claims about products and whether or not they are carried through and legitimate. The [Responsible Purchasing Network](#) is also a great organization that targets smaller items that may not be covered through Consumer Reports. Checking these sites before purchasing products on impulse is the best way to find well-researched, educated and unbiased information on green products.

All of this information probably sounds overwhelming, and you may be thinking "why do I want to do all of this just to find an environmentally safe product?" Sure, it sounds like a lot of work but if you do a little research, keep yourself from being sucked in by marketing ploys and read the details on packaging labels, finding the best eco-friendly products out there will be no sweat and you'll quickly learn all about the benefits you (and the earth) are receiving by using true-to-form eco-friendly, natural and organic products.