

LIVE healthy

MAKE YOUR



Health

**BEST HOME
BUYS** / 2017

HEALTHIER

These standouts will help you breathe easier, sleep better, and keep your space green and clean.

By **KATE ROCKWOOD** Photography by **CHRISTINE BLACKBURNE**

FRESH START

A doormat keeps out all kinds of ick: pollutants, pesticides, dog poo, dirt. Choose coir (a thick, natural fiber made from coconut husk), which provides more friction for getting gunk off your shoes (above, \$13; target.com for similar styles).

BREATHE

1 Honeywell HCM350W Germ Free Cool Moisture Humidifier (\$55; amazon.com) Low humidity can lead to dry skin, itchy eyes, and irritated sinuses; it can even dry out the mucous membrane lining of your nasal passages, making you more susceptible to respiratory infections during cold and flu season. (Between 30 and 50 percent humidity is the sweet spot; higher can allow mold to grow.) Turn the dial on this secret weapon, which uses UV light to kill microbes that might be in the water. Keeping your humidifier clean and mold-free is crucial: This model is also a snap to wash, either by hand or in the dishwasher.

2 Miele Dynamic U1 Jazz Vacuum (\$499; mielestore.com) If you want to actually capture all that dust, dander, and other allergens—and not just blow them back out into the room—your vacuum must have a sealed HEPA filter. Miele vacuums are known for their super suction power (even the less expensive models have 1,200-watt motors) and crazy longevity (20 years isn't uncommon).

3 Honeywell HPA 300 True HEPA Allergen Remover (\$205; target.com) Thanks to common household irritants, like dust, mold, and flame-retardant chemicals in furniture, your indoor air may be twice as polluted as the air outside. An air purifier with a HEPA filter can remove even tiny airborne particles; this one is a workhorse, capturing odors and germs, too—without releasing ozone, a known lung irritant.

Safer scents

Want a whiff of freshness at home? Avoid burning candles or incense. Studies have found that some can release lung-irritating contaminants, as well as chemicals that may trigger skin irritation. Instead, set out fresh flowers or a bough of pine, or simmer water with a cinnamon stick on the stove.

GO GREEN

Some houseplants can remove formaldehyde and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from the air. VOCs, which are released by everything from building materials to cleaning products, can irritate your eyes, nose, and throat and cause headaches and nausea; some may be carcinogenic. The plants absorb the harmful compounds through their roots and leaves. Plants to pick include dracaenas (pictured below), spider plants, and jade plants.



SLEEP

1 LectroFan White Noise and Fan Sound Machine (\$50; [amazon.com](#)) White noise machines muffle sounds that go bump in the night—like your partner's snoring, pipes rattling, or cats screeching outside—so you snooze more soundly. Dainty enough for your nightstand (one *Health* editor even takes hers along when she travels!), this one uses a proprietary algorithm to electronically generate 10 different fan or soft static sounds, which means it doesn't play repetitive loops that some sleepers find distracting.

2 Philips Wake-Up Light (\$170; [philips.com](#)) Jolting out of sleep at the angry beep of an alarm clock is a rough way to start the day (hello, adrenaline!). Waking up with light is more natural, say experts. This alarm clock light slowly increases in intensity, shifting from soft dawn red to warm orange to bright yellow over a period of 30 minutes. If you're somehow still sleeping when the room is fully lit, it uses sound as a last resort.

3 Bedgear Performance Dri-Tec Sheets (\$229 for a queen set; [bedgear.com](#)) While you're dreaming, your body is less efficient at regulating body temp. If the bedroom is too warm or you're prone to night sweats (or simply run hot), your body has to work harder to keep cool, which can lead to a lighter, more fitful sleep. Bedgear's Dri-Tec sheets are made from the same breathable, moisture-wicking synthetic materials used in sportswear, and the mesh hems and sidewalls increase airflow, keeping you comfortable at night.

4 National Allergy BedCare All-Cotton Mattress Cover (from \$135 for a queen set; [natallergy.com](#)) Dust mites—a major allergy trigger—feast on your dead skin (lovely) and live deep in your bedding. Keep them at bay with a mattress encasement; look for a fabric with a pore size of less than six microns. Our microfiber cotton pick has an average pore size of just 2.6 microns and both interior fabric flaps and outer zippers for a tight seal.

5 AllerEase Maximum Allergy Protection Zippered Breathable Pillow Protector (\$8; [target.com](#)) Whether you choose a down or synthetic fill, slip your pillow into an encasement. This one blocks out pet dander, dust mites, and bed bugs but still feels soft and breathable.

6 AllerEase Hot Water Washable Allergy Protection Pillow (\$25; [amazon.com](#)) Unlike most pillows, which lose their fluff in the wash, this synthetic pillow maintains its shape even with weekly washes in 130-degree water (the temp you need to kill dust mites and remove allergens).



Black out

If you're tossing and turning, the light seeping into your bedroom might be to blame. Ideally, the room should be so dark that you can't even see your fingers in front of your face. Blackout curtains are a low-tech, high-impact way to darken your sleep zone—or try a sleep mask.

CLEAN

HOW WE CHOSE THE WINNERS

First, our panel of health pros (see "Meet Our Experts") shared the most important criteria for each type of home product. Then we hunted for goods that not only check off every box but also meet our requirements for value and quality. We also considered third-party ratings, such as the product safety scores from the Environmental Working Group.

No more nasties

Move over, toilet. Kitchen sponges are the true filthiest spot in the house. Kill off salmonella, E. coli, and other illness-causing microbes by popping the (wet) sponge in the microwave for 60 seconds once a week.

1 Honest Wet Mopping Pads (\$9; honest.com) Standard mops can be a breeding ground for bacteria. You could soak the mop in bleach between each use—or skip the decontamination step and opt for a disposable head instead. Double-quilted

and made in part from sustainably harvested wood pulp, these pads are impressively sturdy and effective yet free of ammonia, synthetic fragrances, and other potentially harmful ingredients.

2 Seventh Generation Free & Clear Laundry Detergent (\$8 for 2.95 liters; amazon.com)

This jug of suds gets its cleaning power from plant-based enzymes rather than conventional chemicals, and the detergent skips the usual optical brighteners, dyes, and fragrances that can linger on your clothes (and rest against your skin). The EPA's Safer Choice label means every ingredient has been evaluated by EPA scientists to ensure it meets strict criteria for better health and environmental impacts.

3 Method All-Purpose Cleaner (\$3 for 28 oz.; target.com)

Chemicals in some household cleaners have been linked to cancer, asthma, and developmental disorders (among other health issues). Method's cleaner puts dirt and grime in their place with biodegradable ingredients and none of the more toxic stuff.

4 Simply Spotless Grout Cleaner (\$14 for 16 oz.; simplyspotlessny.com)

Created by a designer who wanted safe but effective products to recommend to her clients (and use in her own home), Simply Spotless obliterates mold and mildew without relying on caustic chemicals. Another Safer Choice designee, without any suspect chemicals for your health and the environment.



MEET OUR EXPERTS

Clifford Bassett, MD, allergist at Allergy & Asthma Care of New York and author of *The New Allergy Solution*

Julia Brody, PhD, executive director and senior scientist at Silent Spring Institute in Newton, Massachusetts

Phil Brown, PhD, director of the Social Science Environmental Health Research Institute at Northeastern University in Boston

Timothy Craig, DO, professor of medicine and pediatrics at Penn State Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

W. Max Kirk, PhD, associate professor and indoor air quality researcher at Washington State University

Kelly Reynolds, PhD, environmental microbiologist at the University of Arizona

W. Chris Winter, MD, sleep specialist and neurologist at Charlottesville Neurology and Sleep Medicine in Charlottesville, Virginia, and author of *The Sleep Solution*