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Getting to the Bottom of Borax: Is it Safe or Not?

Last Updated on **DECEMBER 4, 2017** by **CRUNCHY BETTY**

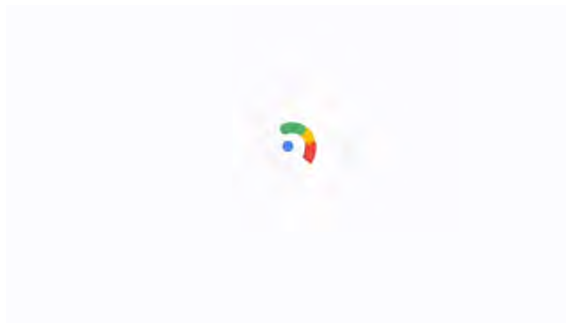


Not one single natural ingredient has me quite as verklempt as borax.

Meanwhile, "green cleaning" site lists it as a wonder cleaner. Natural beauty books

And upset commenters have left diatribes and sent consternating emails about my recipes using borax proclaiming it "toxic!" "dangerous!" "harmful!" "poison!"

Ad



Not surprising, all of the confusion, given the severe lack of cohesive information out there about the safety of borax. The Borax Council has done a terrible job at educating the public. Probably because I just made the Borax Council up.

I think I've gotten to the bottom of most of it, though, and maybe what I've found will help you make a decision as to whether you want to use it in your green cleaning (and beauty) routine ... or not.

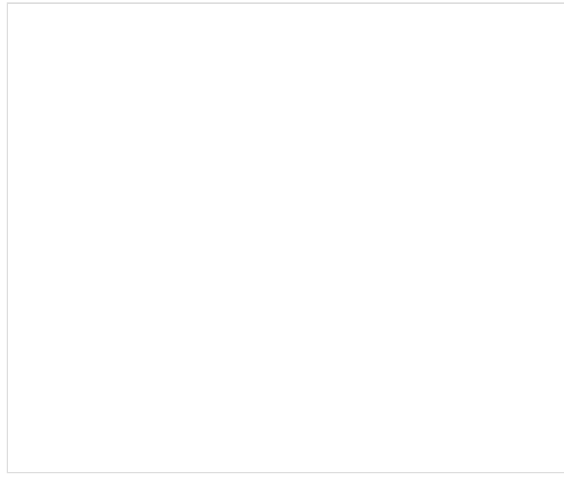
What IS Borax?

Borax, also known (most predominately in the way we're talking about right now) as sodium tetraborate, is a boron mineral and salt that's mined directly from the ground.

Borax **is not boric acid.**

That's where the majority of the online confusion appears. With no surprise; at least half of the studies I've found and citations I've read have listed their testing matter as "either sodium borate or boric acid."

The difference between the two is: Boric acid is produced when borax is reacted with another acid (like sulfuric or hydrochloric acid). The result is an [acid structure](#) (pH of 5.0), rather than alkaline, as borax is (9.3 pH). (I'm not going to get into the "is boric acid safe or not" question here, because that's a whole 'nother can of worms.)



Borax and boric acid are found together in many places, especially volcanic areas where the borax has naturally reacted with sulfur. You can also find both compounds in seawater.

Is Borax Safe or Not?

Sad hint: You still have to make up your own mind. I cannot say yes. And I cannot say no.

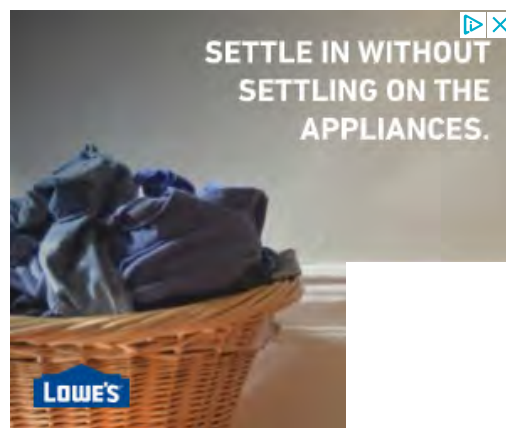
Let me tell you what [some other people say](#), though:

- The EWG's Skin Deep Database lists it as a 5-6 (or moderate hazard), but trying to find the studies they used for their rating proved difficult, and the ones I did find were the nebulous "[borax](#) or boric acid" test studies.
- Looking through the [ToxNet studies on the NIH website](#), I see very few that are concerning for any major danger (unless ingested in high quantities). In addition, the [Material Safety Data Sheet](#) lists borax as a health hazard of 1, the same as [baking soda](#) and salt.
- However, the FDA banned borax as a food additive, and the European Chemicals Agency added it to their "list of substances of very high concern" a few years ago. From what I could find, that had much to do with the ongoing debate as to whether [excess boron in the soil harms crops](#).
- Borax is classified as non-carcinogenic and a mild skin irritant. The high alkalinity of borax is likely what causes skin irritation (just as excessive use of baking soda would cause irritation). There are also several studies in the ToxNet database that show its only a very mild lung irritant and causes no lasting damage. In addition, it [does not penetrate the skin well](#), and is not considered to be bio-

- The one concern is with its potential to disrupt the reproductive system. Studies have not been done in humans regarding this; however, potential reproductive issues in mice are suspected from high levels of (ingested) borax.
- Borax is acutely toxic in the same manner that salt is (in rats, it's 4500-5000 mg/kg of body weight, which is A LOT). Ingested in moderate quantities, it causes gastrointestinal upset and nausea. Bottom line: While it may be listed as "poison" on the box, it's only toxic at very, very high levels. (Like salt, baking soda, and even water is.)

You confused yet?

Here's one more bit of info for you:



Boron is an essential mineral that the body needs for bone building, immune function, and brain function. Plants need it to grow. But, like anything, it's needed in small moderation. Much like salt.

Boron is found aplenty in borax. People even take borax as a supplement and swear by it (I am NOT recommending you do this). That's a little extreme, but I use it as a gauge as to how harmful borax really is.

Borax: My Personal Thoughts

Borax is wholly natural. It doesn't cause cancer, accumulate in the body, or absorb through the skin. It is not harmful to the environment. In fact, the largest borax (borate) mine in the world – found in Boron, California – is considered by many to be the most ecologically sound and environmentally sustainable mine in the United States. This is also the mine where 20 Mule Team comes from.

One last look at borax.

I'm putting to rest my late-night concerns about whether – all along – I've been using some kind of dangerous(!), toxic(!) poison(!).

For me – *and this is my personal determination after months of searching, wondering, and compiling information* – **borax is just fine to use in my household cleaning routine**. ESPECIALLY as a laundry detergent. It's also fine to use, occasionally, as a hair treatment ... or even in a lotion.

I'll just be keeping it out of the reach of kids and my two cats. Not that any of those beings would want to eat it anyway. Lck.

My only teeny, tiny, miniscule concern still lies in using it in my [dishwasher detergent](#). But, frankly, the **only time I ever see any trace of residue on my dishes** when I've used homemade dishwasher detergent is while washing the few plastics that still remain in my house

So, going forward, I'll still be using my borax and washing soda dishwasher detergent, I'll just be washing my plastics by hand (and little-by-little getting rid of them all together ... except my food processor ... anything but that).

And, moreover, I now have a compilation of all kinds of fancy information for the people who come down the road, aghast that I recommend using borax.

Ultimately, I don't think it's that big of a deal. Do you?

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Comments

KarinSDCA says

I love how you research! Seriously.

As for Borax, I use it in my homemade laundry detergent and it works. It works WELL!

I have read many recipes with Borax listed in the ingredients. Thus far, I have skipped any recipe with it. I don't know why exactly. Maybe because I didn't have any? Maybe because I had read somewhere it was bad for you? Perhaps just because any recipe with Borax also required heating and combining several ingredients and I tend to prefer simpler recipes?

I had slowly begun researching Borax and the more complicated recipes using it and I ran across



many hours searching for homemade deodorant recipes WITHOUT baking soda. My immediate concerns regarding Borax were as simple as that. I have sensitive skin. Period.

But, all that other stuff I started reading... OY! Ultimately, I have decided almost the same as you have. Fine for laundry detergent. Never would consider it internally. Never considered it for dishwasher detergent, but that was a different issue. I am looking for it locally in bulk at a health food store to try a little to see if my skin can tolerate it (in the healthiest form I can find it). Haven't found any yet and was considering just using the stuff I use for laundry detergent. It doesn't irritate my skin in that manner, but it is all washed out by the time my clothes touch my skin.

Thank you for finishing my research for me!!! I sincerely appreciate it. I am going to try making something using the stuff I have and, if all goes well, then buy a pound from MRH for future body care products.

Rupunzlemom says

Thanks for the research. Hulda Clark, who wrote a book about the cure for cancer, recommends Borax water as a substitute for shampoo. She is firm on removing ALL petroleum products from your home. I don't think she would recommend something that was harmful.

I have been using it for years, as cleaner and diluted with water as shampoo. I love it.

mhikl says

You are wise Rup. Research before you take anything internally or put on your skin. Thankfully we have the internet and do not have to rely upon 'experts' (hamstrung by the pressures of peer review and peer acceptance) and the commercial media where self-interest reigns supreme. Do your research well and you will be rewarded.

PS I suspect you have an iconoclast lurking inside. Knowledge will help set her free. 😊

Vanessa says

Susan says

I agree! Before I read your comment....I was going to post even salt and water can be toxic to the human body if taken in excessive quantities.....truth be told I was never worried about whether it was dangerous or not....I mean seriously if you want a natural cleaner when and where does the madness end? Sometimes even going "natural" has its limits.....as far as Im concerned.

[Moona](#) says

Thanks for your research!

Annette says

Thanks Crunchy Betty! I have been using a homemade laundry detergent that includes Borax for years. The "am-I-doing-the-right-thing" fairies have been floating around inside my head all that time. I think I can finally shoo the fairies away! Your research is thorough and sound and just what I needed. As for using it in the dishwasher... well, I'm still looking for an alternative. Keep on Crunching! You're helping to save the planet one soap bubble at a time!

Brenda W. says

My box of 20 Mule Team says the ingredient is Sodium Tetraborate. The Mtn Rose Herbs catalog sells Borax "cosmetic grade sodium borate".

Are they different products? I don't know.

Would I consider using 20 Mule Team in my personal care products? Hell no!

Would I consider using cosmetic grade sodium borate? Probably. Something labeled as 'cosmetic



mhikl says

You will forever be safe if you listen to your doctor, Brenda. Feelings over research is the way for you to feel safe.

Carol says

Is that a corgi ??

Barbara says

Safe doctor is an oxymoron. To a very large degree, when it comes to remedies, physicians simply do what they are told ... by their teachers, mentors and pharmaceutical companies. With all this research going on, we've all likely read that the bans in place are a direct result of the potential impact to pharmaceutical industry revenue borax would pose if it were widely accepted as a nutritional supplement in "safe for human consumption" forms (think, zinc, magnesium, iron, etc). Kudos to Batty for doing her homework and coming out with a logical conclusion. I ingest borax at a rate of 125 mg per day and know others who ingest two and three times that amount with only positive things to say about it. It has reduced my arthritis pain and allowed me to get a "Look, Mom! No cavities!" report from my dentist for the first time in over a decade. So, you don't want to ingest borax. I get it. I was skeptical, too. But come on, folks. Don't listen to your doctor on these kinds of things. They are part of "the system", and through no fault of their own, cannot/should not speak to that which they have no unbiased education around.

Aimee says

I used it once to wash my hair, like a bs wash when no 'pooing and lemme tell you, my hair was FABULOUS. I read on some natural living board, a woman used it all the time, and so I tried it and was like omg my hair is great! Of course, then AFTER the fact I started reading all the OMG YOU'RE



Annie says

Hi @Barbara, I feel very much the same way. I was raised very holistically, and have found many things that much of the time the solution is really the opposite of what the media is telling you. I have been taking Borax for about 2-3 years now. I don't take it all the time, but when I do, I drink a tsp from my pitcher which is a mix of 1 tsp Borax in 1 liter of water. I suffered a head injury and I feel that the Borax has helped my body to sort of "regrow" and nearly everyday I pop and creak and snap and crack out my dents and dings from all my accidents. Just recently though, I have been noticing that I feel the Borax more and more intensely. Like I said, I don't take it all the time because I think it was around 2013 when I heard about fluoride and I was real scared about it and wanted to do something but didn't want to be mixing chemical bombs in my head, so I only take it in small bits for small amounts of time and now whenever I take it, I feel like my brain is being rewired back (but also forwards) to the natural evolutionary state of being, rather than being subjected to all the damage it has suffered. Post-trauma, I have noticed that my memory tends to slip away, I tend to lose what I was saying a lot, like grasping for a thought in the open air, but more and more I am able to often times recover it. I have read that Borax helps to decalcify your third eye, or pineal gland, which main operation is cognitive thought, (this is why the Nazi's used fluoride to make the people docile and are trying to use it again now). My opinion is that the reason the people who are controlling you tell you these things are bad for you is so you can't actually HEAL yourself! I mean look around, ever since they burned all the witch-doctors and shamans and healers so that white man could be the best doctor, we have been struggling to recover the remedies lost and have only been ailing ourselves more. The pharmaceutical companies only want you to add another expense to your life, only want to keep you coming back forever. Example: You cut your leg, I bop you on the nose so you won't feel the pain in your leg. Do you want a solution to the symptom or a remedy for the ailment? But to make it even worse, throw in the fact that they are also actually poisoning you for profit! Look at Monsanto, GMO, look what's actually in your medication, your food, your household products. Methadone, Propylene-glycol, carrageenan, parabens, food-coloring.... BAD BAD BAD! CANCER, SUGAR, HIGH-FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP. Chemicals. CHEMICALS that the FDA was SUPPOSED to catch. CHEMICALS that are giving you the symptoms that make you run to the doctor. So they give you a pill that covers up that symptom. Like putting a cork in one of SpongeBob's holes, again and again and again until you end up on their table as a experiment. But wait.... I'm missing the actual point where you BECAME an experiment. When did that happen?

Christina says

When laundry seems like soap nuts won't do it alone, I shake some of one or the other directly in the washing machine. (I hope it isn't destroying the Soap Nuts?!?).

No problem so far, and I'm intrigued regarding the dish detergent idea. Whatever it is, I will verify, but it seems it must be better than the old Cascade, etc.? Isn't it!?!?

[Natural Beauty Vixen](#) says

Great article! Thanks for writing this. The safety of borax is something I've wondered about, but hadn't yet gotten around to looking into. It really helps clear up the confusion (mine included) about borax vs. boric acid.

Becky says

Thank you. This one has been bugging me since I read some of the horror stuff out there. It seemed over hyped, but still... I don't want to hurt my kids! This seems reasonable! I'm not scared of the borax monster anymore.

[jessica Anne](#) says

Yay Borax! I love that you do all the work for me. I use it in a mixture with vinegar and a tiny bit of castille soap, and water. I love it and I'm not going to stop.

Margie says

Hey, lookie there. Reading my mind again. I was in the store the other day, eyeing up a box of Borax and pondering it's healthiness and thinking there was a bit of research ahead of me. And lo and behold, what do I find in my inbox this morning? All the research done for me and confusion clarified. So I think I will be trying my hand at laundry detergent, because, quite frankly, I've tried three natural, non-toxic, blah blah blah detergents and none get my husband's eau de soccer game out of his clothes.