

FANCY FOOD

& CULINARY PRODUCTS

Cleanders Come CLEAN

Today's specialty kitchen care products are prettier, safer and better smelling.

By Jessica Goldbogen Harlan

Doing dishes and wiping down the countertops might seem like an onerous chore, but a handful of specialty cleanser manufacturers are aiming to make it a little sweeter smelling for homemakers. The upscale cleanser category continues to grow, proving that consumers are willing to invest more money on higher-ticket items than the commodity products found in big-box stores.

With therapeutic aromas, ingredients that are less harsh and toxic, attractive packaging and specialized formulas, these products are better for the environment, for upscale kitchen surfaces like granite and stainless steel, and, most importantly, for users and their families.

Monica Nassif, president and founder of Caldrea (877/576-8808) and Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day

(877/865-1508), describes consumer interest in safe ingredients as a natural progression. "It started 10 to 12 years ago with organic, less processed foods," she says. "Then it moved to personal care: What am I putting on my skin, and bathing my children in? Now she's starting to make more informed decisions with what she has in her home. Cleaning is the next evolution of that."

Adds Séverine Mathé, product development director for Fruits & Passion (800/276-9952), "The environment is a major factor and customers are paying more attention and learning about the importance of using environmentally friendly products, both for their health and for the planet's."

Fruits & Passion's Cucina collection of cleaning products, designed

especially for the kitchen, are made from natural, biodegradable ingredients, such as olive oil.

Making Scents

Who says that a clean home has to smell like ammonia and bleach? Most of the specialty cleaning products on the market have more soothing, uplifting smells, inspired by fruits, herbs and flowers ranging from familiar to exotic.

New from Caldrea is Ginger

says Nassif. Other new giftable products include a spring-cleaning kit in a Rhubarb scent, and a plug-in air diffuser, both from the company's entry-level product line, Mrs. Meyer's. The spring cleaning kit includes window spray, all-purpose cleanser, dish soap and countertop spray, packaged in a cardboard carrying caddy.

The Mrs. Meyer's assortment also has a new fragrance, Basil.

"All of our fragrances [for Mrs. Meyers] have to be inspired from

"The trend is definitely going towards more environmentally friendly products," says Séverine Mathé of Fruits & Passion.

Pomelo, a citrus-based aroma that is the company's 15th offering. Nassif says the company has also started creating seasonal fragrances. This past holiday, there were three holiday-inspired fragrances, and for the spring, Watercress Wild Lily will be available only for a short time, and will be promoted for Easter and Mother's Day.

"We have proven that in an ungiftable category, you can have lots of phenomenal gift items,"

a Midwestern garden, something that's single-note and very clear to the consumer," says Nassif.

Fruits & Passion's newest fragrance for the Cucina line is Orange Sanguinelli and Fennel (blood orange and fennel). Other equally exotic flavors from the company include Zucchini Flower and Truffle, Ginger and Sicilian Lemon, and Fig and Fresh Herb.

Unusual fragrances are also a mainstay in the Gourmet Kitchen and Organic Kitchen product lines from Upper Canada Soap (866/638-8417), where scents include Patchouli Grapefruit, Nutmeg Ginger, Mint Sage and Lemongrass Saffron. The company's Organic Kitchen line is made from all-natural and botanically derived ingredients, and contains no synthetic dyes, preservatives or fragrances.

Biodegradable sponges are the specialty of **Twist** (303/443-9953 or www.twistclean.com), which says consumers will be rewarded for using the products by finding durability and a great capacity to clean.



Meanwhile, Advanced Products (774/219-8643) specializes in high-end room sprays at affordable prices.

“We wanted to create a market where customers weren’t getting gouged but getting very high quality,” explains Jeff Skaff, principal. The products have odor-eliminating properties and are made with essential oils, so the aromas, such as Lavender and Lemon, are authentic.

The company recently added kitchen cleaning products to its assortment, including formulas that are designed specifically for some of the upscale materials being used to design today’s kitchens.

“It’s [made of] stuff you wouldn’t be afraid to use in your home — there are a lot of harsh chemicals out there,” says Skaff. Next up is a room spray made from 71-percent organic ingredients.

The Howard Naturals line by Howard Products (800/266-9545) also capitalizes on the upscale materials used in today’s kitchens. The company has products specifically geared towards surfaces



like granite and marble, stainless steel, wooden kitchen cabinets and butcher blocks. The products are made from vegetable-derived ingredients and are available either in a fragrance-free formula or in essential-oil scents like Lemongrass Lime and Grapefruit Ginger.

"We try to tell the story that our products are task-specific, not all-purpose," says Justine Lopez, marketing coordinator for Howard Naturals. "It's ridiculous to think that you could have one cleaner for all the different surfaces in your house. If you're going to spend the time and money to upgrade to those nice surfaces, you want to have cleansers that aren't going to harm and pit those surfaces."

Tools for the Task

Specialty cleaning products call for special tools — sponges and scrubbers — made with higher-quality materials than the typical plastic and synthetic commodity products.

That's where companies like

Home fragrance is another important specialty category, and **Advanced Products** (774/219-8643 or www.advancedproducts.com) specializes in high-end room sprays at affordable prices.

Twist (303/443-9953) and Loofah Art (203/359-9232) fit in.

Twist launched last year with four biodegradable products, including sponges, cleaning cloths and loofah scrubbers.

"People are more environmentally conscious now, and they're looking for better alternatives," says Brian Ross, CEO of Twist. "These products perform as well [as commercial products currently on the market] and they look nicer in your kitchen."

What's more, he says, consumers who are hesitant about the slightly higher price point should know that they generally last longer, meaning that in the long run, consumers are saving money.

For instance, the company's European Sponge Cloth absorbs 12 times its weight in liquid, and Ross says it's equal to 17 rolls of paper

scrubbing household items in third-world countries.

Not only is it an effective cleaning tool, but also loofah is more environmentally responsible than synthetic scrubbers in more ways than one.

"Loofah Art was green before it was cool," says Liwette. She enjoys educating consumers on little-known loofah facts, such as the fact that it is a vegetable related to the cucumber, and is a sustainable crop that also quickly biodegrades when disposed, rejuvenating the soil with nitrogen.

As a kitchen cleaning tool, it can be used on everything from stainless-steel pots to Teflon to crystal, and can even be used to scrub fruits and vegetables. "It's as effective as steel wool," says Liwette. "I've used it on an outdoor grill."

The company has 62 shapes, and one of its best sellers is "Scrubby Feet," a penguin shape introduced last year. Vegetable shapes such as eggplant, carrot, pineapple and chile pepper are also hot sellers.

Caldrea is also extending its reach



category, it helps to tell a good-better-best story to offer something for every consumer.

Retailers can also help generate interest in specialty cleaning products by simply using them in their stores.

"Clean your shelves with them, and have a tester bottle out so that people can smell it," suggests Lopez of Howard Naturals. "Once they smell the fragrance, chances are they'll fall in love with it."

Some companies, including Howard Naturals, offer sample packets retailers can offer customers so they can try the products out at home, risk-free. To get sales associates enthusiastic about promoting the products, retailers can give them product to test out at home.

Liwette of Loofah Art suggests retailers can cross-merchandise or create gift ideas by displaying her whimsical sponges along with a cotton dish towel with the same motif or color, held together with a bag clip. A gift set can also be assembled using green housewares like a recycled cutting board, string shopping bags and decorative sink strainers.

What's Next

With continued consumer interest in better-quality products and goods that are better for the environment in every way, there's no doubt the specialty cleaning category will continue to grow. And for retailers, this translates into repeat sales for this highly consumable category.

What's more, consumer interest in cooking — and shoppers' related interest in having gourmet kitchens — means they also won't hesitate to put down a little more in better-quality cleansers to protect the

"We've proven that in an ungiftable category, you can have lots of phenomenal gift items," says Monica Nassif of Caldrea/Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day.

towels. The Loofah sponge will naturally scrub pots and pans without scratching them.

Loofah Art, meanwhile, has taken the loofah "out of the bath and put it in the kitchen," says Anita Liwette, co-founder. She was inspired after she saw some of the many ways that loofah is used for

into the tool category, particularly with its new specialty laundry collection launched earlier this year. In addition to detergents especially formulated for specific types of laundry, such as sports apparel and dark clothing, the new line includes a folding board (for neatly folded shirts), wooden hangers, and a clothes brush "like the one your dad would have had," says Nassif.

Cleaning House

Whether you've carried cleaning products for years, or it's a new addition for your store, it's time to take a new look at an old category.

"The cleaning aisle is not a browseable aisle," says Nassif of Caldrea. "We're trying to add some excitement, a reason to stop and look — that helps in terms of getting behind the category in a big way."

Showcase an assortment of companies, highlighting the breadth of their line, particularly if they have a number of products available all in the same fragrance family.

Nassif adds that because there are now a number of players in the



Taking scents from culinary inspiration, the line of cleansers and hand care products from **Upper Canada Soap Company** (800/548-4097 or www.uppercanadasoap.com) includes varieties like Patchouli Grapefruit, Nutmeg Ginger, Mint Sage and Lemongrass Saffron.



investment they've already made in upscale furnishings and finishes.

Watch for even more eco-friendly product introductions in the future, say manufacturers.

"The trend is definitely going towards more environmentally friendly products," confirms Mathé of Fruits & Passion. "The bigger

Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day (877/865-1508 or www.mrsmeyers.com) is the entry-level line from Caldrea (877/576-8808) boasting gentle, environmentally friendly cleansers in a variety of soothing scents for the kitchen.

brands are trying to make their niche into this market, and there is strong competition to produce products that have more natural ingredients but are just as efficient as the traditional chemical-based products. This is what the customer expects."

Indeed, big players like Clorox, which introduced its Green Works natural cleansers, are eyeing the category, but Nassif says this is good news for specialty retailers and smaller brands.

"It validates the concept, and is good for everybody," says Nassif. "It's good when you have a big gorilla helping you educate the market in terms of why it's important to have better cleaning products in your home."

Liwette says products in this category help customers take a small step to become more environmentally responsible.

"The beauty of an item that's affordable is that it helps people in this country who are financially challenged or intimidated find a way to green their kitchen," she says. "They can start with one little Loofah Art scrubber and already make a difference."

While environmental issues will likely be one of the biggest drivers in this category, it won't be the only trend that spurs sales. Flavor trends will likely impact fragrance introductions, and home décor will influence product design.

"We believe that trends in home décor, along with other categories such as food and fashion will also continue to drive the specialty cleanser category that people want to bring into their home," affirms Ruth Kruger, marketing director for Upper Canada Soap. "People will also continue to look for convenience, expecting products to come in pre-moistened towels, travel sizes, and more." ©