

Washing-up liquids – traditional v eco friendly

Introduction

The media have been very proactive over the past few years in publicising the impact of detergents on the environment. Essentially, these detergents tend to be toxic and non-biodegradable ie they are not broken down naturally into less harmful products, and can thus end up polluting our rivers and aquatic life.

New green retailers such as 'Ecover' have responded to this problem by developing a range of alternative washing machine, cleaning and washing-up liquid products which are now widely on sale in high street supermarkets.

This report compares two washing-up products, 'Fairy' liquid and 'Ecover' Camomile and Marigold and covers the following aspects:

- The contents of each product (as described on the labels);
- The description of each product by their respective manufacturers;
- Price
- Personal experience of using them;
- Conclusion and personal opinion.

Note: It is not our intention to persuade our readers one way or the other, but mainly to give information which will hopefully assist in future decision-making about the relative attraction of alternative products.

1. Product Contents (info solely from product label)

'Fairy liquid'

15 -30% anionic surfactants
<5% non-ionic surfactants

Note: the nature and amount of the following, additional contents are not quoted:

Methylisothiazolinone
Phenoxyethanol
Perfumes

Limonene
Linalool

'Ecover' Camomile and marigold

5 -15%
Same

Nil
Nil
Perfume specified as "Camomile: Contains Limonene";
See line above

Nil
Note: in addition, this eco-product contains the following ingredients:
30% water
0.02% Preservative
Plus the following in unspecified amounts:
Milk whey (see below)
Extracts of camomile and marigold
Citric acid
Salt

2. (i) Manufacturer's description of product

'Fairy liquid'

"New Fairy's richer, more concentrated formula washes more plates with every squirt so that you can be sure that are getting the same Fairy value. What's more, new Fairy comes in a range of fantastic fresh scents. Exactly what you would expect from The UK's favourite washing-up liquid."

'Ecover' Camomile and Marigold

Fresh, plant based fragrance;
Contains milk whey, known for its skin-softening properties;
Based on plant and mineral Ingredients;
Fast and complete bio-degradability;
Minimum impact on aquatic life.

2 (ii) Additional advice from manufacturer

Fairy liquid:

"After use, rinse your hands and dry them thoroughly. As for all detergents, if you have damaged or sensitive skin, contact with the liquid and the washing solution."

'Ecocover' Camomile and Marigold

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(No mention of any prolonged detrimental effects

Also: contains limonene: may produce an allergic reaction

(As above

3. Price

Fairy liquid

The supermarket price is £0.98, but customers should note that the bottle only contains 450ml. The adjusted price would therefore be £1.10 for a 0.5 litre bottle. Fairy liquid is thus 38p cheaper than 'Ecover' when adjusted to the 0.5 litre size.

Ecover Camomile and Marigold

The supermarket price is £1.48 for the 0.5 l bottle.

However, as with many products, larger, more economic sizes are available, and this particularly applies to the 'Ecocover' range. The Camomile and Marigold variety, for example is available in a 1 litre bottle costing £2, thus making this size cheaper than 'Fairy liquid'. (Fairy liquid only appears to be available in 450 and 650 ml bottles, but both come out as being more expensive than 'Ecover' at the 1 litre equivalent size).

Note: Taking into account the Tesco April 2009 'Ecover' offer of two 1 litre bottles for £3 makes this product size significantly cheaper than 'Fairy'.

4. Personal experience of using both products

Fairy liquid

The manufacturer's description seems accurate – it is clearly a very concentrated product and produces a lot of soap with just one squirt; it is noticeable that cleaned items require a lot of rinsing.

'Ecover' Camomile and Marigold

Since it contains 30% water, it is clearly a much less concentrated product, and produces a much thinner foam. It is noticeably easier to rinse items after cleaning.

5. Conclusion and personal opinion

It is not difficult to see why 'Fairy' liquid is such a popular brand, since it does what it says it will and clearly will provide more washes per squirt than 'Ecover'. 'Fairy' also leaves dried plates with an attractive 'shiny' appearance which 'Ecover' doesn't.

On the reverse side, Fairy liquid clearly contains a lot of unattractive and poorly described additives which seem unlikely to be biodegradable, and hence likely to damage the environment. The shiny appearance of dried goods thus seems likely to be purely cosmetic. The contents of 'Ecover' seem carefully chosen and environmentally friendly.

On a personal level, I would no longer be keen to use 'Fairy' or other similar washing-up products ahead of 'Ecover' and equivalent green products.

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