

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Thank You For Your Feedback!

Thank you to the 160 Sebastopol residents who sent in your STEP Survey cards. We appreciate hearing your thoughts about the newsletter, including how you use it and what articles you'd like to see in the future.

So, what were your responses?

■ **91% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Keep doing TNS; it is great!", "Thank you for your excellent newsletter," "Keep the useful tips coming," "Thanks for your great work and for caring so deeply," and "Keep up the great work!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **33% said you use pesticides at home or work** (a slight decrease from last year's 35%). **Of these, 42% use only natural pesticides**, 12% use synthetic/toxic, and 46% use both.

■ We're delighted that **69% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce your use of toxics.** That really makes our work feel worthwhile.

For instance, readers expressed appreciation for the "great information on [less-toxic] cleaning products"; the suggested nontoxic remedies for ant, rodent, and other pest problems; the information about where to dispose of prescription medicines, batteries, and electronic-waste; the updates on legislation to support; and raising people's overall awareness and attention to toxic issues.

Several readers indicated that they're committed to not using any toxic materials, which is great. Folks also told us that they're using soapy water to handle aphids, and vinegar instead of toxic materials for housecleaning and managing weeds. One reader said that they stopped using Roundup about eight years ago, "after your article on how it [harms] frogs.... We now have many more frogs again in our urban 'farm'." How wonderful!



Congratulations to everyone who's finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics. With these choices, you're supporting a healthier environment for yourself, your family, and our community.

Also thank you for your excellent questions and ideas for future articles; you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

Additionally, as always, we appreciate your acknowledgment of our work. We're delighted to be of assistance.

Please keep your feedback coming! Your input helps us create a newsletter that's useful for *you!*

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"Thanks for the newsletter, I always read and enjoy it. Blessings,"

~ JB, Sebastopol

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Answering Your Questions

■ **Is there email delivery of the TNS newsletter?** Yes, that's available! Folks in or out of City limits can email that request to STEP@healthyworld.org.

■ **Where can we dispose of everyday toxics, such as batteries, CFLs, and thermometers?** For information about what's toxic and where to dispose of it, see the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's site www.recyclenow.org or its Recycling Guide in your AT&T yellow pages. Or call them at 565-3375.

■ **When's the next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day?** Community Toxics Collections occur every Tuesday from 4-8p at various Sonoma County locations. The next Sebastopol one is **August 9**. To make an appointment, call 795-2025 or (877) 747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. Also, the Household Toxics Facility is open for dropoff, Thurs. through Sat. at the central dump, near Petaluma.

A Great Drain Declogger

I've previously talked about various ways to unclog drains without using toxic mainstream drain cleaners. Well, I recently found another wonderful option at Sebastopol Hardware, called Zip-It! You just insert this hard plastic jagged tooth strip down into the drain then pull it out with the obstruction. Then, ah, the water flows again! It works especially well on those tough hair clogs. (Note: This is an unsolicited testimonial, motivated only by glee!)

Did You Know?

The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, it costs about \$100 a year plus in-house copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$10 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our health, now and long into the future.

Cultivating Lush & Healthy Garden Soil

Two readers asked for more information about building garden soil, both to prevent pests and produce more abundant yields.

This seemingly simple inquiry actually reveals a key point about nontoxic living: that it goes beyond just swapping in less-toxic products to kill pests. Ideally, it's also a different way of thinking that acts to avoid problems by nurturing strong and healthy systems from the start.

In the domain of gardening, this healthy approach starts with healthy soil. So how do you create that?

1) Buy soil products and amendments that are allowed on organic farms, which often have an "OMRI" seal. This avoids the toxics allowed in mainstream fertilizers.



2) Identify which products will best nurture your particular soil and plants. For instance, compost can loosen soil and increase drainage and biological activity; it's especially useful if your soil is high in clay. Also consider adding other nutrients such as bone meal, rock minerals, or kelp. Some plants are "heavy feeders," such as tomatoes and corn, and benefit from specific fertilizer types, both at planting and during their growing season.

For more specific advice, bring a soil sample to an eco-nursery such as Harmony Farm Supply (823-9125, www.harmonyfarm.com). Or get a soil test, to better target your garden investments. For more amendment ideas, see www.extremelygreen.com/fertilizerguide.cfm.

3) Compost your food scraps to create your own luscious fertilizer (and notably reduce your garbage volume). More about doing this is at www.healthyworld.org/joyscompost.html.

Read more tips for healthy preventative gardening in my Ask EcoGirl column, "Creating a Healthy Garden From The Start," at www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl1g.html

Timely Tips

The TNS Online Index makes it easy for you to look up past newsletters by topic. You can quickly discover what's toxic, and the effective alternatives, in everything from landscaping to pest control to pet care.

For instance, here are some seasonal topics of interest, including some that readers asked about in the survey. Get more information about each by looking under the **bolded** word in the Online Index at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html.

- Healthier **housecleaning**
- Nontoxic **gardening**
- Safer **pet care**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mold, rodents,** and **earwigs**
- Eliminating **weeds**, including the yellow flowering **oxalis**
- Repelling **mosquitoes** without toxics
- Protecting your **teenagers** from toxics at their summer jobs
- Keeping toxics out of our waterways by bringing your car to a **carwash** instead of washing it in the driveway

More Ideas for Detoxing Cookware

In my previous article, "Detoxing Cookware," I answered a reader's question about nonstick pans, which are a potential source of the perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) being found in most of our bodies. My advice? Avoid nonstick pans when possible (using glass, enamel, and stainless steel instead); appropriately buy and care for any nonsticks you do use; and identify and reduce your other PFC exposure sources.

I also invited readers to share their positive experiences with the new "green" nonstick pans. A few folks did, so I thought I'd pass those thoughts along as further input.

For instance, one reader said that she loves cooking eggs in her Scan-Pan, which "has lasted many years without the surface scratching." I researched and found that **Scan-Pan's Green Tek** product has a ceramic-titanium nonstick surface, is PFOA-free, and allows the use of metal tools. While this pan

seems like a decent option overall, I wouldn't give it a perfect grade because it doesn't identify its nonstick polymer, only avoids one PFC (PFOA), and doesn't provide its specific care information online.

A friend of mine also recently raved about her **Cuisinart Green-Gourmet** nonstick frying pan, which she says is "a dream to cook with and clean up." The surface is hard-anodized aluminum with a *petroleum-free* ceramic-based nonstick coating that doesn't contain PFOA or PTFE. So this seems to be a slighter better option to consider.

A few readers also emailed me about their passion for **cast iron** pans, which they find to be nonstick when properly seasoned. I don't personally use these pans, because of their weight and special care needs, and I don't know that they offer the convenience that folks seek with nonstick pans. However, I pass that along as another option.

I also want to mention one reader's suggestion of using **bamboo cooking utensils** as natural non-scratching tools. What a good idea!

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. **STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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