

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Preparing Your Non-toxic Spring Garden

For some of us, on those days when the world's dramas just seem too much to bear, there's no better cure than digging our hands in the dirt, and being part of the miracle of life's growth. Plus we do enjoy savoring and sharing the garden-fresh produce and colorful blooms that result. Ah, life's essential pleasures!

So, as I see spring emerging again, I suspect that many of us are considering how we want to shape this year's garden. Will it be in the back yard, at a friend's house, or in a school or community space? Even a few pots on the back porch can help fulfill these cultivating urges!

However, along with their plants and seeds, some people might also be bringing toxic pesticides into their lives, often without really understanding the risks. These materials can do more than harm the user, family, pets, ecosystems, and neighbors at the time they're applied. Most will also linger and cause damage long after, staying in the soil, getting tracked into houses, moving with the breeze and rain, polluting the water supply, and exposing people and places for hundreds of miles and beyond.

What's worse is that these toxic products can also actually make our gardening work harder, for instance by killing the beneficial insects that keep ecosystems in balance and pests at bay. Did you know that most agricultural pests in California weren't at pest levels until *after* we started using modern toxic pesticides?

So how can you create your garden without using toxic materials, and through that, nurture a healthier home and neighborhood for all?

Key Steps

1) Plan ahead. Most garden toxics can be avoided simply by considering in advance how you'll keep your plants healthy by non-toxic means. So identify which plants you want to grow, and what light, water, and soil conditions they require. Then lay out your garden so that these plants find themselves happily located in appropriate spots. Also get advice about when to put each type of plant in the ground. (For more on this process, see TNS VII/2, www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol7no2.pdf)

2) Nurture your soil. Organic farmers often say that healthy plants start with healthy soil. So consider how you can nurture a vibrant foundation for your garden. This might include digging up and weeding your space while the ground is still moist from winter rains, and adding compost and other soil amendments to meet the needs of the plants you're growing. (For more about this step, see TNS XI/3, www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol11no3.pdf)

3) Understand your products. Read the labels and understand the risks of any pesticides or fertilizers you're using or considering. Take all package warnings seriously, and peruse other information resources to really understand their harm. Don't just assume that a product is safe. For instance, most folks aren't aware that "Weed & Feed" fertilizers can actually include serious toxics. (For more about assessing toxics,

STEP Updates

■ **Thanks to everyone who sent in your yellow STEP Feedback cards.** Your comments really do help us serve your needs. As usual, we'll report the survey results in the next issue.

■ **If you can't find your card, you can get a substitute one** at www.healthyworld.org/STEPsurvey.html. You can also contact us any time via the methods in the "About STEP" box on the other side.

■ **Thank you also to this year's fabulous and much-appreciated STEP Stuffers.** Twice a year, we invite folks to help us stuff the yellow Feedback cards into the water bills. These have actually turned into fun little social events, as we playfully gab together while feeling happily productive in community service. This year's STEP Stuffers were Judy Wismer*, Sharon Kaiser*, Andrea Martinelli*, Pat Peters, Linda Levine, Fredrica Sumelius, Shyama Blaise Lozier, and Catherine Sharp. (Folks marked with an * are *Special* STEP Stuffers, because they came to both sessions!)

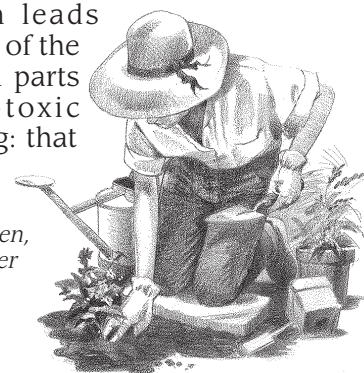
■ **You can look up past issues of TNS in our Online Index.** Here you'll find out what's toxic and the alternatives in everything from housecleaning to air fresheners to pest control. www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html

see TNS V/4, www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol5no4.pdf)

4) Investigate and convert to non-toxic alternatives. Home gardeners really don't need to use toxic pesticides! Sometimes you can just swap in another less-toxic product. At other times, the best remedy is to step back and solve the underlying problem.

Which leads us to one of the other fun parts of less-toxic gardening: that

See Garden,
over



Preventing Poisoned Waters

Ah, water, the raw material of mystics and poets. But it's indeed much more than that. According to the nonprofit Beyond Pesticides, "Water is the most basic building block of life. Clean water is essential for human health, wildlife, and a balanced environment."

Unfortunately, though, says the organization, "water is being polluted at unprecedented rates, with pesticides, industrial chemicals, nutrients, metals, and other contaminants. Studies of major rivers and streams find that 90% of fish, 100% of surface water samples, and 33% of major aquifers contain one or more pesticides at detectable levels. As a result ... drinking water is also widely contaminated."

Certainly, the first step we can do is to avoid using toxics that can pollute local waterways. You can also see Beyond Pesticides' website for other ways that you can help protect our shared water resources, including supporting truly protective regulations. Through this, you'll be helping benefit both people and the planet. www.beyondpesticides.org/water/index.htm

Garden, continued

it pushes us to think differently, to learn a bit more about how nature works, and to make nature our ally instead of treating it as an enemy that needs to be poisoned into submission. Through this, we can experience the sweetness of deepening our connection with the natural systems that make all life possible.

The STEP Online Index has more helpful less-toxic gardening tips, suggestions for what to plant when, management techniques for specific pests, and various composting methods. Look under topics such as Gardening, Weeds, Snails, and Lawn Care. www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html



Protecting Children from Toxics at School

Parents often don't consider that their children might be exposed to hidden toxics in school buildings, grounds, and sports fields. These materials can include those known to harm children's ability to think and learn, the proper development of their growing bodies, and even their emotional well-being. Children's smaller body weight and developing systems are especially vulnerable to both acute and ongoing toxic exposures.

To help create a minimum safety standard for children at school, Rep. Rush Hold has recently introduced the federal School Environmental Protection Act (SEPA). This would seek to reduce pesticide use by requiring all public schools to adopt integrated pest management (IPM) programs that emphasize non-chemical pest management strategies and only use defined least-toxic pesticides as a last resort. For more on this bill, see www.pesticide.org/the-buzz/2012/01/27/the-school-environmental-protection-act-sepa

Learn more about how parents can protect children at school in TNS II/5, www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol2no5.pdf

States In Action

In past issues, we've talked about the vital need to reform this country's key federal toxics law (TSCA), so that it will actually fulfill its stated purpose of protecting people, pets, and ecosystems. This action is key to preventing so many illnesses that cost Americans so much, physically, emotionally, and financially.

However, some states aren't waiting for change at the national level. By taking action themselves, they're helping protect their citizens while experimenting with different remedies which can then be adopted by other states, and eventually even the federal government.

Supporting this process overall is SaferStates, "a coalition of state-based organizations championing solutions to protect public health

and communities from toxic chemicals." This network includes doctors, nurses, parents, environmental advocates, and concerned citizens. Even businesses are supporting these changes, in order to protect their workers and customers, reduce health care and regulation-related costs, avoid the need to store and dispose of hazardous waste, and trim future liabilities.

For a handy list of current state-level actions, see www.saferstates.org/2012/01/safer-states-2012-legislation.html. Learn more about SaferStates at www.saferstates.org.

Carpenter Bee Patrol

A reader asks how they can deter carpenter bees from "eating my house." For some simple non-toxic management tips for these round black bees, see www.beyondpesticides.org/alternatives/factsheets/CARPENTER%20BEE%20CONTROL.pdf.

However, it's also important to note that carpenter bees rarely cause severe damage, and are valuable pollinators that actually warrant our protection. According to the nonprofit Beyond Pesticides, they don't pose a threat to humans, usually don't interfere with human activity, and generally won't sting unless they're handled roughly. They will tunnel into some types of wood to make nests, but they do so slowly and their damage is easily curbed. For more about the lives of carpenter bees, see www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpenter_bee

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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