

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Got Weeds?

What's a weed really? Just a plant growing where you don't want it! So what do you do about unwanted plants if you prefer not to use herbicides but don't have time to weed?

One easy solution is mulching with leaves, grass clippings, wood chips, and other materials that suppress weed growth.

Another creative option is planting stronger plants that keep the unwanted ones at bay – while also holding the precious soil and nutrients in place.

For instance, you can plant living ground cover around bushes, trees, or along the street for both beauty and easy maintenance. And if you choose native plants, maintenance is even easier and you encourage beneficial local insects and birds.

What to plant? Here are some ideas from local native plant experts:

- Native sedum (low-growing succulents with yellow flowers)
- Native oxalis (redwood sorrel, in white or pink; perfect around redwoods and other shady places!)
- *Fragaria californica* (woodland strawberry)
- Yellow-eyed grass

To fill in larger areas, consider:

- *Achillea borealis* (native pink yarrow)



- *Festuca rubra* (spreading native grass; grows up to 6-12")
- *Scirpus* ("fiber optics" native grass; grows up to 8")

If you have large areas where you'd like to alleviate high grass or weeds or where you want to keep away invasive alien grasses, star thistle, and burr clovers – consider planting clover. It helps build up your soil's health, doesn't grow to a fire hazard, looks good, and helps our struggling honeybee population.

To try different varieties in your spot, first dig or disc away the grass, then try seeding different clover varieties in clearly marked sections. Water as needed until they're established. Then watch them grow to see what works best for you.

These are just a few ideas to get you started! Explore your options and get further advice from books, websites, or a nursery specializing in natives. Find some plants you like and that match the sun, water, and soil type of your growing area. Then spend the time you would've weeded watching your plants grow!

Note: Some plants, such as certain roses, don't like anything growing right under them. Use mulch instead, being careful not to mulch above the crown or graft.

~ Rebecca Dwan

STEP On The Web

Want to let others know about the STEP program and share the information in our newsletters? Want to see back issues? It's all there at <www.admin.ci.sebastopol.ca.us>

Consumer Alert



What's the Matter with Roundup?

As the toxicity of herbicides like **2,4D** became increasingly clear, some turned to products with the active ingredient glyphosate, like **Roundup** and **Rodeo**.

Glyphosate is a broad spectrum post-emergent, systemic, and non-selective herbicide used to kill broad-leaved, grass, and sedge species. It's the nation's second most commonly-used home and garden pesticide, and the third most commonly-used on industrial and commercial land. Each year 38 to 48 million pounds are used in the U.S., with about 25 million applications in U.S. households.¹

Unfortunately, while better than 2,4D, Roundup is not as safe as some believe (or even claim!). Here are some important facts:

■ **Harm to Humans and Animals.** Glyphosate products are acutely toxic to humans and animals, with symptoms like eye and skin irritation (lasting up to 7 days), cardiac depression, gastrointestinal pain, vomiting, and accumulation of excess fluid in the lungs.

Glyphosate is the highest cause of pesticide illness for California landscape maintenance workers, and the third most commonly-reported cause of pesticide illness among agricultural workers.

One ingredient in Roundup (POEA) is actually more toxic than glyphosate, with the combination even more toxic. (The testing that allowed Roundup on the market was just for glyphosate, not the full formula, a serious flaw in the pesticide regulation system.)

Even ordinary use of Roundup can cause problems. One user wiped their face with a hand that had contacted leaky Roundup

See **ROUNDUP**, over

Community Gardening with PEA

■ On **April 6th, 7th, and 8th**, Planting Earth Activation (PEA) presented a three-day festival and planting weekend in Sebastopol. On Friday, community members gathered to work in the Sebastopol Community Garden on Laguna Parkway. Saturday brought a benefit concert at the Sebastopol Community Center. And on Sunday, PEA gathered Florence Ave. neighbors together to plant 9 organic gardens at people's homes. Through this they seek not only to create local organic gardens, but also to help neighbors connect and support each other's gardening endeavors.

Over the past 2 years, PEA has planted over 100 organic gardens in Sebastopol. Also (with STEP and assisted by Public Works) they're landscaping our city property to support pesticide reduction.



■ **You can get involved with PEA!** Their next gathering is **Sat. May 20th** from 1-5pm at the Sebastopol Teen

Center. They'll have educational talks, presentations of current projects, a potluck meal, and discussion groups about what to do next to help this project grow. Learn more about what they're doing and how you can be involved!

■ PEA (with STEP) will be leading landscaping projects on different pieces of city property. Join them the first Sunday of each month, from 11am to 3pm. Bring water, a hat, gloves, and any tools. It's an added bonus if you bring a truck!

Sun. May 6th. Sebastopol Town Plaza. Replanting the three planter circles (including the one with the famous "Door") with sages, lavenders, California poppies, and other colorful herbs and flowers.

Sun. June 3rd. Laguna Parkway. Replanting in front of the movie theatre and police station.

Sun. July 1st. Covert Lane. Meet at Covert Lane and Pleasant Hill to remove weeds and plant native plants.

Call Craig Litwin at 829-2108 for more information about PEA's work.

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ABOUT STEP

The Next Step is published six times a year for Sebastopol residents by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program** (STEP).

STEP's mission is to support Sebastopol citizens in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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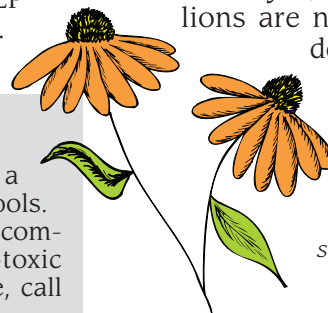
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A Great Night of Rumi

It was standing room only at Sebastopol's Masonic Hall as 300 people came and were inspired by the timeless mystical poetry of Rumi. And STEP also benefited from the evening! Many thanks to organizers Larry Robinson, Jeff Edelheit, and Dan Zola who donated \$500 of the proceeds to support the work of STEP (as well as \$500 to KRCB). Bravo, bravo!

You can help make STEP possible! Write an article, share your success story, or be a liaison to businesses and schools. Together we can support our community's conversion to less-toxic alternatives! To find out more, call Patricia Dines at 829-2999.



ROUNDUP, continued

spray equipment – and got a swollen face! Another spilled Roundup and got recurrent eczema of the hands and feet for two months.

And then there's the county highway worker who sprayed thistles which then cut through his overalls. He was hospitalized with severe internal chemical burns and blood infection. The next day, his leg was so swollen that his ankle was the size of his knee and he had a 105° fever. The doctor wanted to amputate his leg because of the threat of gangrene. Luckily, he recovered with his leg intact, but the veins in his leg were permanently clogged and burned.²

Glyphosate can cause other long-term damage. Population studies show increased miscarriages and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Animal studies show genetic damage, reduced sperm counts, cataracts, and thyroid, pancreas, and liver tumors.

■ **Harm to Ecosystems.** Studies have shown that Roundup kills beneficial insects and is hazardous to earthworms, which are vital for soil health and vitality.³

■ **Long-lasting.** The manufacturer's own tests show that it takes up to 140 days for *half* the glyphosate to break down or disappear. Residues were found in lettuce, carrots, and barley planted a year after treatment.

■ **Able to Drift.** Tests conducted by the University of California, Davis, found that glyphosate drifted up to 1,300 feet during ground applications. This increases unintended exposure and harm to humans, animals – and plants you want to keep!

So, what's the alternative? See the article on the other side for easy options. Or maybe just see through a child's eyes, where those dandelions are not a problem but a delight!

~ Patricia Dines

For this article's footnotes, see the website <www.admin.ci.sebastopol.ca.us> or send a SASE and request "Footnotes (3)."