



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

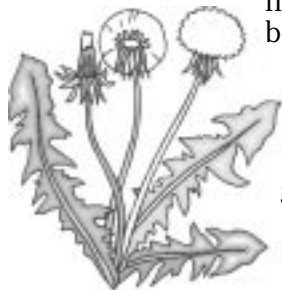
Eating Your Weeds

Did you know that you probably have food treasures hiding in your backyard, ready to nourish and delight you and your family? They're hiding in plain sight, disguised only by the name "weed." And you can unearth these treasures simply by looking with different eyes and finding out which plants are edible. Then – instead of killing those "weeds" and poisoning yourself and your home – you can enjoy new delicious (and free) dinnertime treats!

For instance, the modest **dandelion**, so often the target of lawn warriors, is now being rediscovered for its nutrition and taste by gourmets and people wanting to improve their health. Dandelion leaves are rich with potassium, iron, and vitamins A, B, C, and D. (In fact, they have more vitamin A than carrots!) The root is a bitter tonic, stimulating and helping heal the liver and gallbladder. Dandelions aid digestion, cleanse the blood and tissues, and are useful in treatment of skin diseases.

How do you use dandelions? Their young fresh leaves are delicious in salads, sandwiches, steamed vegetables, and soups, to add a little slightly-bitter punch. You can even add some of the yellow petals to your salad, for a dash of color. Dandelion

flowers can also be made into wine and jelly, and the roots can be roasted and ground as a coffee substitute.



How can you manage your dandelion stock? Dandelions spread by seed and any piece of the taproot left behind will sprout again. If you want to eat them just in the spring, pull them up by the roots at that time.

Important: When foraging for plants, be sure pesticides haven't been used there! Look for plants that are fresh and clean, in areas that are away from car and foot traffic. For more information on foraging, see *The Flavors of Home: A Guide to Wild Edible Plants of the San Francisco Bay Area*, by Margit Roos-Collins.

It's ironic that many of the herbicides used to kill dandelions are harmful to the liver – while dandelions nurture the liver. So the best thing for your health is not to *kill* dandelions – but to *eat* them!

~ Patricia Dines

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Here are some other common plants that make easy foraging:

■ **Clover** petals and leaves are wonderful and sweet to use as another vegetable green (though some folks do have trouble digesting clover).

■ Kids love it when you point out the tiny **chamomile** blossoms growing in almost every sidewalk crack and lawn, as they can make a tea just like Peter Rabbit's mother. Just make sure the kids do not confuse them with other plants. Chamomile is a composite flower.

■ **Mallow** is another persistent weed. Try its mild pink flowers.

Here are some added tips:

■ To eat flowers, shake off any bugs, lightly rinse if needed, and use immediately or store between damp

Parkinson's Disease & Pesticides

Exposure to toxic pesticides is being increasingly linked to the onset of Parkinson's Disease (PD), a neurodegenerative disorder that makes everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt difficult and, eventually, impossible.

For instance, a recent Stanford study concluded that PD patients were twice as likely to have been exposed to in-house insecticides than people without the disease. And a large case-controlled study at Michigan's Henry Ford Health System concluded that contact with herbicides gave people a four times greater chance of developing Parkinson's.

More than one million Americans currently have PD, and every nine minutes another person is diagnosed. PD is the second most-common neurodegenerative disorder in the U.S. after Alzheimer's. Just 10% of PD cases are attributed directly to heredity.

SOURCE: "Getting on Our Nerves", Diane Marty, E Magazine, Jan/Feb 2002, p. 40.

paper towels for an hour or two. Store the flowers whole, then pull off the petals for use. Eat the centers of small flowers such as chamomile if you wish, if you're not allergic.

■ Hay fever and general-allergy sufferers should usually avoid flower centers, pollens, etc. If in doubt, proceed with caution or avoid new flowers altogether.

■ Pictures of many edible flowers are at <<http://homecooking.tqn.com>>, and many reference books are available, such as our own local Robert Kourik's *Designing and Maintaining your Edible Landscape Naturally*.

■ Many of these plants also have herbal uses; look in an herb book for more information.

■ To reserve an area from animals, try a loose piece of chicken wire over it, or a few short stakes in the ground.

■ Please make sure kids are clear that many plants are poisonous, or may be growing in a toxic area, and that they can only eat the ones you allow!

~ Rebecca Dwan

Bringing Beauty to the Downtown Plaza

On Sunday, June 2nd members of Planting Earth Activation (PEA), Mayor Sam Spooner, Sally Soufer (our City's volunteer coordinator), and an assortment of volunteers replanted the landscaping circles in our Town Plaza. Shasta daisy, white sage, and lavender are just a few of the species that were planted. All the plants were bought at the Sebastopol Farmers Market.

The following day, Dante Del Prete from Sebastopol Public Works installed an irrigation system and mulched around the plants with woodchips to save on water usage and give the circles a finished look.

This is a classic example of how multiple groups and agencies can come together to simultaneously beautify our city, reduce the use of toxics, and support the local economy.

The finished project looks great! Please take a look and enjoy. And, if you want to help with projects like this, **join us the first Sunday of every month from 12 to 4:00 p.m.** We meet at the movie theatre parking lot, across the street from the police station. Bring water to drink plus tools and a wheelbarrow if you have them. Our next planting dates are **Sun. July 7, Aug. 4, and Sept 8.**

~ Craig Litwin

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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The Glories of Borax

In past issues we've discussed nontoxic cleaners you can make with vinegar, non-toxic liquid soap, tea tree oil, and baking soda. (Check our website for back issues, if you missed some.) The two mighty home-cleaning giants are surely vinegar and baking soda, but borax can also play a valuable role.

Folks 50 and older probably remember Ronald Reagan on TV with the "20 Mule Team Borax" commercials. Borax is a naturally-occurring mineral salt (sodium tetraborate decahydrate) made of sodium, boron, and water. Humans have known about borax for 4,000 years, and it's still here, in a big inexpensive box!

Borax has a wide range of uses in the home and beyond. It cleans, disinfects, deodorizes, softens water, and inhibits mold growth. Here are some of the many household uses of borax:

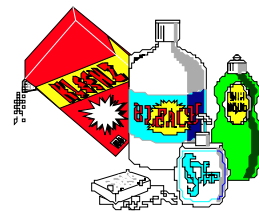
■ **Clean your bathroom.** Put borax on your sponge or mix with some warm water and you get a cleaner with some scrubbing action that's non-abrasive. It makes your porcelain enamel surfaces sparkle and can even be used on fiberglass surfaces without scratching. And clean your toilet bowl by swishing 1/4 cup with a brush and letting it stand for at least 30 minutes (overnight is better).

■ **Clean your kitchen.** Clean and deodorize your fridge by mixing 1 tablespoon borax with 1 quart of warm water and washing with a sponge or soft cloth. Rinse with cold water. You can also wash your indoor and outdoor garbage pails with the same borax solution. Then sprinkle a little borax in the bottom of the dry pails to help reduce odors as the pails fill up.

■ **Clean your clothing.** Add 1/2 cup borax to the load with your detergent and it makes cleaning more efficient (by softening the water). It also helps deodorize and remove

"Cleaning products are among the most toxic products you'll find in your home."

Debra Lynn Dadd,
*Nontoxic,
Natural, &
Earthwise*



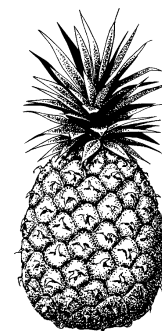
stains, making your clothes cleaner and fresher-smelling. It's especially useful if you have hard water.

Borax has no toxic fumes and is practically nontoxic in regular use. It can however be an eye irritant and it's important to keep it out of the reach of children, to avoid accidental ingestion. Kids can help with the cleaning if they're old enough to avoid ingesting, spraying in eyes, etc.

And note that, when mixing borax, it dissolves much more easily in hot water than cool.

For more uses, see the 20 Mule Team Borax box. More uses can be found at <www.purex.com/documents/borax.pdf>, a handy booklet with ideas from flower preserving to candle wicks. Borax is available at Albertson's, Fiesta, Fircrest, Safeway, and Whole Foods.

~ Patricia Dines
with Rebecca Dwan & Helen Ingersoll



A Fun Activity for Kids!

You can grow a pineapple plant at home! At the store, find a pineapple with a healthy green top. Have a grownup cut the green top off, leaving about one inch of fruit attached. Let the pineapple top dry for a few days, then plant it in a pot with the green part up. Water it every few days and you'll get a beautiful tropical plant. Be sure to protect it from the frost and you might just even get a pineapple to grow out the top (after quite a while!)

~ Craig Litwin