



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Designing with Permaculture

If you're interested in living ecologically and sustainably, permaculture can offer unique and powerful ways to do just that. Permaculture is about refining our lives to eliminate waste and produce abundance. We all use permaculture when we use one car trip to run multiple errands instead of just one. This, though, is just the beginning.

### What Is Permaculture?

Permaculture (a merging of "permanent culture") is a design science that considers how we can take care of people's needs and the earth's needs at the same time, by creating relationships that are mutually beneficial for all species.

It looks for ways that humans can co-exist with their local environment, respecting its natural limits and well-being, and using natural resources effectively, not wastefully. Through this, we help create a resilient, secure future for our culture, today and for generations to come.

Permaculture has three main ethics: 1) Care of Earth, 2) Care of People, 3) All Surplus Energy is Cycled Back to the First Two.

Permaculture offers many guiding principles for design of human systems of all types and scales. These principles have been derived from observing how natural systems work and provide for themselves. Here's just a couple to give you an idea:

■ **Stacking functions.** Each element in a system should be cho-

sen and placed so that it performs as many functions as possible. For example, when you plant a fruit tree you can create shade, food for animals and humans, habitat, fuel for heating (by cutting limbs), parts for crafts and arts, and livelihood (because you might sell the fruit, etc.). Planting a tree can also add to our depleted water tables, because trees slow down clouds and help to create rain. What additional uses can you think of?

■ **The problem leads to the solution.** Perceived constraints actually help reveal resource solutions. For instance, let's say you have a window that lets in the warming sun in the winter but too much heat in the summer. You could pay for lots of energy for air conditioning. Or you could plant a deciduous tree outside the window, which will block the sun's rays only in the summer, while using the sun's light to add beauty and natural habitat to your home.

In a permaculture model, the health of a human community, its food, water, shelter, economy, medicine, are linked to the health of the local ecosystem, which in turn is linked to the health of all ecosystems. Using permaculture principles, we can support a variety of activities, including sustainable forestry, locally-run businesses, and growing organic food and medicine as close as possible to its area of consumption. As we refine our permaculture practice, we move from supporting organic agriculture, to local organic agriculture, to even growing organic food at our homes and in our neighborhoods.

See Permaculture, over ...



## It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating *two years* publishing *The Next STEP!!* Thanks to everyone who helps make this project possible – including the City Council and City staff who support us in bringing this information to you.

We are enthusiastic about the new stories we're preparing for the upcoming year, and hope that they continue to support you in creating a healthier home and world.

**Please fill out and return the enclosed survey card, so we can know how best to support you!** And we invite you anytime to send your questions, tips, comments, story ideas, news, class notices, etc. Have you or your organization reduced or avoided using toxics? We'd love to know about and share your story!



"Thank you! I think *The Next Step* is Great. Makes me happy to be in Sebastopol."

• • •

"I Love the newsletter! It's given me so many ideas and is so friendly not preachy."

• • •

"Thanks for your informative newsletter. I appreciate what you offer our community in the way of nontoxic cleansers, herbal remedies, etc. I used your advice for tea tree oil and water to clean mold, applied it to my shower and it worked very well... so much better than those smelly, toxic cleansers! I look forward to reading the new issue."

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"I don't always take the time to tell you this, but I love *The Next STEP*. It almost makes me wish I lived in Sebastopol. Hallelujah for you all!"

## Index to Previous Issues

Now it's easy to find the information in the back issues of The Next STEP that can help you create a healthier home and world for yourself and others.

What toxic products do you want to consider avoiding? What are their actual health and environmental risks? What are the viable less-toxic (and often less-costly) alternative approaches you can use? This index helps you find out!

To get a copy of a back issue, go to the City's website (shown below) and look under Programs. If you don't have web access, send a SASE and a note with the desired issue numbers and your phone and/or email to the address below.

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### Permaculture, continued ...

Permaculture can be used in any situation, because it's proactive, solution-oriented, and tangible. For instance, we can provide for our needs for drinking and irrigation water while protecting our watersheds by conserving, storing, and reusing water. We can catch rainwater, use our bath and laundry water to irrigate fruit trees through a simple natural filter, even store water in the soil by capturing it with a contour ditch.

Using permaculture principles, we might decide to build a house using on-site resources of clay sand and grass (a cob house), and designing it to capture sun and heat, cutting back on our energy costs. We could grow kiwis and grapes on the roof and run the roof-water into a pond. This pond might also be habitat for birds and frogs that help eliminate any pest problems in our garden. The garden in turn



might grow a variety of useful plants that provide for our food, fiber, and medicinal needs. And instead of a fence to block out a neighbor, we might grow a living fence of pears and apples that we both can enjoy while maintaining privacy.

Can you see the connections between everything? Permaculture is about designing relationships between elements, looking at whole systems working symbiotically for mutual survival. The earth is one of these systems, so is our community, and so is your home.

We're lucky in Sonoma County to have an abundance of permaculture educators and courses that can teach us about these design methods. The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center offers courses; see <[www.oaec.org](http://www.oaec.org)>. And look for books at local stores, including Gaia's Garden by Toby Hemenway.

And stay tuned for future issues of *The Next STEP* newsletter, as we continue exploring permaculture's principles, ideas for ecological solutions, and valuable guidance in creating healthy, safe communities that are sustainable for the long-term.

~ Abby Wing & Erik Ohlsen

## 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.

**Newsletter Editor and Layout:** Patricia Dines

**Newsletter Editorial Team:** Rebecca Dwan, Craig Litwin, and Patricia Dines

**Newsletter Design Concept and Logo Design:** Lyn Bouguereau

**STEP Founders:** Michael Black, Patricia Dines, Rebecca Dwan, Jeff Edelheit, Nan Fuchs, Craig Litwin, and Larry Robinson.

STEP, P. O. Box 1776, Sebastopol CA 95473  
WEB: [www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us](http://www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us)