



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Spring, Spring, Glorious Spring!

Spring is here! **Now is the time to begin planting your spring garden.** Start with frost-hardy plants, as we can get frost until May 1. **Good vegetables to plant now** include: Broccoli, kale, beets, turnips, potatoes, peas, onions, chard, chives, and hardier lettuces.

For flowers, you can plant alyssum, poppy, hollyhock, and calendula (a great edible flower).



Managing Slugs & Snails

With the spring can come slugs and snails that love to munch on your garden and landscape plants. Slugs and snails play an important role in the environment, cycling organic matter back into rich soil and providing food for a variety of wildlife. Still, you might want to protect special areas from their feasting.

Be cautious, however, with the approach you choose, as many slug and snail products are toxic and can harm you, your pets, and your family. For instance, slug baits can contain metaldehyde, which is toxic to the nervous system. Even Sluggo, a common snail bait, has a high amount of so-called "inert" ingredients, which can actually be toxic but are hidden from consumer view.

TNS 1/2 offered key **tips for non-toxically managing slugs and snails.** Here are some more:

■ **Water your garden in the morning,** not at night. Slugs and snails love the damp and dark.

■ **Ring your plants with barriers** (ideally 3" wide) to stop snails' slime trail. Materials to use include: crushed eggshells or oyster shells, coarse sand or gravel, wood ash, sawdust (not cedar), bran cereal, coffee grounds (they don't like caffeine), and seaweed (they don't like saltiness; seaweed also nurtures the soil with trace elements). Some of these need to be reapplied if they get wet.

■ **Encourage birds, toads, and frogs** to live in your garden. They love slugs! (Invite birds with a bird bath and dense foliage. Toads and frogs enjoy a pond with logs or stones for daytime cover.)

■ **Keep domestic ducks, geese, or chickens,** which eat slugs. (Keep these animals away from young plant seedlings, which they also eat.)

■ **Remove items nearby where slugs can hide overnight,** such as boards, stones, and debris.

■ **Turn a container upside down** (for instance, a pot), then prop up one side to create an opening. Dampen the ground underneath. In the morning, you will likely find that slugs have crawled inside. Then either release them a distance away, or drop them into hot soapy water.

~ Patricia Dines

Preparing Your Landscaping

While the ground is wet, **it's a good time to replace your lawn** (for instance, with water-conserving

STEP Index Online

Do you want to know more about a particular toxic or alternative? The STEP Index Online makes it even easier to create a healthier home and world. Just go to <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>, find your topic of interest, and click to see the related STEP article(s). Voilà!

A sample of topics of interest this time of year include:

Ants • Aphids • (Household) Cleaners • Composting • Dandelions • Earthworms • Edible flowers • Gardening (by the season) • Herbicides • Insecticides • IPM (Integrated Pest Management) • (Nurturing a Healthy) Lawn • (Managing) Mildew & Mold • Mosquitoes • Paints & Stains • Permaculture • Pesticides & Health • Pest Control Alternatives • (Less-toxic care of) Roses • Sheet Mulching (to start a garden quickly) • Snails & Slugs • Tanglefoot (for insects on trees) • Water supply (protecting from toxics) • Weeds

This webpage also has information about **Common Sense Pest Control**, the definitive book on less-toxic alternatives for pests of all varieties — insect, plant, and animal. (The Sonoma County Library has a copy.) Plus this webpage offers **links to more sites** with information about these and related topics. We've sorted through the deluge to find the best sources for you.

Yes, the information you seek is just a few clicks away!

landscaping). Look for groundcovers and other plants at local nurseries.

If you have **troublesome blackberries or ivy**, cut them down now to ground level (on a dry day). Put a pinch of salt and/or a teaspoon of vinegar on the stump to halt regrowth. Replenish if it rains or gets watered.

~ Rebecca Dwan

SOURCES: Kate Burroughs, *Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery* • *Journal of Pesticide Reform*, NCAP, by Caroline Cox, Fall 2004 • *Dead Snails Leave No Trails: Natural Tips for Pest Control* • *Tiny Game Hunting* • *Yes magazine*, March/April 2005, p.62-3.



Doctors Warn About the Harm of Pesticides

Is there solid scientific evidence to show that pesticide exposure is harmful to human health? The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) conducted a year-long systematic review of published research and concluded that there are "consistent links to serious illnesses" and strongly warned about the risks of pesticide exposure.

Researchers reviewed 250 peer-reviewed studies published between 1992 and 2003 on the chronic human health effects of pesticides. These scientists found compelling evidence of **links between pesticide exposure and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL)**. NHL is the fifth most common cancer in the U.S. Rates have increased 82% over the past 25 years, outpacing the overall cancer increase of 25%.

The scientists also found that studies linked exposure between commonly-used pesticides and **brain cancer, prostate cancer, kidney cancer, pancreatic cancer, reproductive problems, and neurological disease**.

The family physicians emphasized **the special vulnerability of children** to pesticide exposure, and noted that some children have an increased risk of **acute leukemia** if exposed to pesticides in utero or during childhood, especially from pesticides used on lawns, fruit trees, gardens, and indoors.

The report contained sweeping recommendations to cut pesticide exposures, including avoiding pesticide use; using personal protective equipment including respirators at home and work; and urging physicians to advocate for pesticide reduction and to screen their patients for pesticide exposure.

(Most doctors have no training in pesticide exposure diagnosis.)

Said one physician, "Many of the health problems linked with pesticide use are serious and difficult to treat — so we're advocating reducing exposure to pesticides and prevention of harm as the best approach."

These assessments have been echoed by a group of medical specialists from Europe, Canada, and the U.S. In the *International Declaration on Diseases Due to Chemical Pollution*, they **declared that the number of untested chemicals in the environment is "a serious threat to children and to Man's survival."**

Signed by 80 medical experts, including two winners of the Nobel Prize for medicine, the Declaration has been endorsed by cancer specialists, pediatricians, epidemiologists, and toxicologists.

The Declaration describes the many chemicals in our environment as well as several alarming health trends — including the increase in chronic diseases; the global increase of cancers at all ages; the increase since 1950 in non-smoking related cancers in industrialized countries; Europe's annual increase of 0.8% in childhood cancers; and rising rates of sterility, with 15% of European couples now infertile.

Among its recommendations are implementation of the Precautionary Principle to protect public health. This principle states that when an activity raises threats of major and/or irreversible harm to the environment or human health, then precautionary measures should be taken even if not all the cause-and-effect relationships are fully understood. The analogy is that, if people drinking from a certain well keep getting sick, it's best to stop drinking from that well, even if the exact cause is not fully understood.

The signers noted that we are exposed to a multiple chemicals at once, so one cannot always isolate which chemical is causing which end effect. Nevertheless, they conclude that the evidence of the individual and cumulative harm from these chemicals warrants notably stronger

preventive action "to anticipate and avoid serious and/or irreversible [health] or ecological damage."

~ Patricia Dines

SOURCE: *Two New Warnings on Pesticides & Chemicals*, Pesticide Action Network • Northwest Coalition for Alter natives to Pesticides (NCAP) <www.pesticide.org/ontario.html>

Help Keep Toxics Out of Our Environment

As of Feb. 9, 2006, California law forbids putting electronics, batteries, fluorescent lamps, or mercury-containing devices into the garbage, because they leach from landfills into our water and beyond. For more about how and where you can properly dispose of these toxics, see <www.recyclenow.org> or call (707) 565-DESK (3375).

Use Your Writing Skills to Help Your Community

Are you a writer? Do you want to help reduce the community's use of toxics? Write for *The Next STEP* and you can share your wisdom, empower constructive action — and get your name in print! Articles can be short or in-depth. To find out more, email the Editor at <PDines@compuserve.com>.

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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