

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Cultivating Your Spring Garden

For many of us, the first murmurs of spring bring thoughts of planting a beautiful garden, overflowing with a bounty of vegetables and flowers.

You can make those dreams come true, without using toxics, by starting your garden on a solid foundation. Your harvest will be healthier food, reduced pest problems, and a safer environment for yourself, your family, and our local ecosystem.

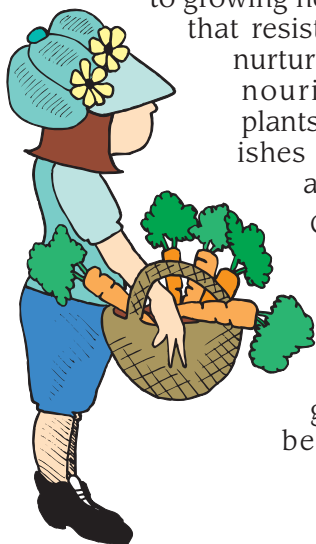
Here are the easy steps for creating a garden that's naturally healthy for everyone:

■ **Weed.** Removing weeds from your garden by hand is much easier when the ground is somewhat soft. Do it soon and avoid using herbicides. Or use sheet mulching (see TNS III/2).

■ **Till.** Dig or rototill your soil to loosen compaction and prepare for planting. Free up at least 6" deep.

■ **Fertilize.** Fertilizing is key to growing healthy plants that resist pests. Plus nurturing your soil nourishes your plants which nourishes your food – and you!

Choose a soil amendment that meets the needs of your soil. Most gardens can benefit from



amendments with organic matter (such as compost), especially if your soil is high in clay, as is common around here. Organic matter will loosen up your soil, increase biological activity, and improve drainage. You can also add nutrients using bone meal, rock minerals, or kelp.

For more ideas for soil amendments, see <www.extremelygreen.com/fertilizerguide.cfm>. For more advice on how to improve your soil, consider getting a soil test kit or bring a sample to an expert.

Be sure to use products approved for organic farming (often marked with an OMRI seal) to avoid the toxics and heavy metals often found in mainstream fertilizers.

■ **Choose.** Whether you grow from seeds or starts, picking the right plant for the right place will make everything easier.

Look at your garden spot at different times of day. Does it get sun all day, part of the day, or is it always shady? This will help you choose wisely. For example, tomatoes, zucchinis, and peppers need lots of sun, while lettuces will bolt (go to seed) if they get hit by our hot summer heat.

Also consider getting companion plants, which lore says can help protect plants – for instance, pairing marigolds with tomatoes. If you're new to gardening, or including children, plant something that grows quickly, like radish seeds, so that everyone can see results soon.

■ **Plant.** When the danger of freeze is over, you're ready to plant. The

See *SPRING GARDEN*, over

Healthy Air Fresheners

Despite charming natural images, many mainstream air fresheners can actually include highly toxic materials – with no warnings on the labels. (For more about this problem, see "Perfume Dreams" in TNS IV/6.)

Thankfully, there are wonderful alternative solutions that are healthier and actually smell better. For instance:

■ **Regularly open up the windows**, perhaps with the fans on, to circulate the *original* air freshener throughout the house.

■ **Find and solve the cause** of troubling smells. For instance, empty garbage cans frequently and clean as needed. Then sprinkle borax or baking soda in the bottom to help avoid odors. Also, clean out the fridge regularly, and keep an open box of baking soda inside to help control odor.

■ **Try zeolite**, a group of naturally-occurring minerals, most derived from volcanic ash. Zeolite's honeycomb structure and natural electrostatic attraction has been shown to remove even strong odors and toxics from the air. It's available online.

■ **Bring in natural scents.** Decorate with fresh flowers or pine boughs. Place cloves or fragrant herbs in a small bowl or sachet bag to scent a bathroom or kitchen. Or simmer dried herbs or cut lemons in a pot of water on the stove. Be sure to avoid packaged potpourris with synthetic scents. Instead, use dried herbs and essential oils derived from natural materials.

■ **Scent your cleansers.** Add essential oils to your natural cleaning products and leave behind a healthy clean smell.

■ **Make natural sprays.** For a natural spritzer, put distilled water into a small clean spray bottle with some of your favorite essential oil. Add a little alcohol if you want it to last longer. Then just

See *HEALTHY AIR*, over

Sparkle That Porcelain

A number of readers have asked for non-toxic cleaning tips for porcelain sinks, tubs, and toilets.

■ **The Basics.** Regular cleaning of porcelain is easy: just use a wet sponge and a non-toxic non-chlorine scrubbing agent, such as **Bon Ami**, **baking soda**, or **borax**. All three also help deodorize. I sprinkle Bon Ami in the toilet, brush with a toilet brush, then let it soak until the next use finishes the job. The health food store also has natural cleaning products, like **Ecover Cream Cleanser**.

■ **Kick It Up a Notch.** If you need something better at cutting grease, consider cleaning with **washing soda**. Be sure to rinse well, and don't use on fiberglass, as it can scratch. For mineral buildup, try **vinegar**, **lemon juice**, or a **pumice** stone.

■ **Stronger Cleanser Formula.** For tougher situations, try this **tub-and-tile spray cleaner**: 1/2 tsp washing soda, 1 tsp borax, 1/4-1/2 tsp vegetable-oil-based liquid soap, 3 tbsp vinegar, 2 cups very hot tap water. Place in a spray bottle and shake well. Spray on and clean with a damp sponge.

For more non-toxic cleaning formulas, see *Clean & Green*, by Annie Berthold-Bond.

Spring Garden, continued

exact timing varies each year, so ask your local nursery for advice. Be sure to give each plant enough space in your garden. Yes, squash really does take that much room when it grows!

Now, with these easy steps, you've created a safe and healthy garden for you and your family to nurture. Enjoy the delightful harvests in return!

Thank you to Kimberly Rossi, at Friedman's Garden Center, and Dan Kerbein for their contributions to this article.



Largest Human Study Yet Links Pesticides and Increased Risk of Parkinson's Disease

Results of a Harvard study, published in the *Annals of Neurology*, show that exposure to pesticides might boost the risk of developing Parkinson's Disease (PD) by 70%. Outcomes were the same with both work and home exposure.

Based on information from 143,000 participants in the U.S. "Cancer Prevention Study II Nutrition Cohort," this data confirms animal studies linking pesticide exposure to motor function abnormalities and decreased levels of dopamine, a brain neurotransmitter. Declines in dopamine have long been associated with Parkinson's.

"This is the first large human study that shows that exposure to pesticides is associated with a higher incidence of Parkinson's," said study lead author Dr. Alberto Ascherio of Harvard's School of Public Health.

Ascherio indicated that the association found in his study was stronger than any previously documented, and commented that more work is needed to pinpoint which specific chemicals help spur Parkinson's.

According to Robin Elliot, Executive Director of New York City's Parkinson's Disease Foundation, "This is certainly the biggest and most serious populations study on people, and it appears to be the best proof today that there is a general association between pesticides and Parkinson's among people."

PD currently effects one million Americans and is this country's second most-common neuro-degenerative disorder, after Alzheimer's. PD makes everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt difficult and, eventually, impossible. More about pesticides and Parkinson's is in TNS II/4 and V/3.

SOURCE: "Pesticides Could Raise Parkinson's Risk," by Alan Mozes, *HealthDay News*, June 26, 2006 <www.healthday.com/view.cfm?id=533466>

Healthy Air, continued

shake and spray when you want to give the air a lift. Scents I enjoy include lemon (to refresh), rosemary (to wake me up for work), and lavender (for bedtime). Local herbalists also offer herbal spritzer products.

■ **Consider an air filter** for more serious situations, to actually clean your air, not just cover up smells.

With natural air fresheners, you can have fun while knowing you're creating a home where it's safe to breathe deeply and relax.

For more ideas, see "The Sweet Smell of Clean" in TNS IV/1. For more great tips for creating a healthy home, see *Home Safe Home* by Debra Lynn Dadd.

Safe Lawn Care

Now is also a good time to prepare your lawn. But be sure to read product labels carefully. Pesticides (including the highly-toxic 2,4-D) are hidden inside those common "Weed and Feed" products. You *can* have a pretty yard without poisoning your family and wildlife. See TNS IV/3 for more about healthy lawn care.

Inviting All Tips

Got a great healthy household tip to share? Please email us. Who knows – perhaps you'll find yourself on these pages!

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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