



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Feeding the Bees

Sitting on my little back deck, I love watching the thick black bees feeding on my potted lavender and sage. As the flower stalks drift in the wind, I see each bee buzz up, catch a little blossom, take a tiny sip, then buzz to the next blossom and repeat. For a moment, I'm mesmerized by this meditative dance, delighted that my flowers are contributing to nature's functioning. I imagine the bees buzzing back to their hives and feeding their scented-treasures to their hungry tribes.

This scene has become even more poignant to me recently, as I read about how the long-standing threats to our nation's bees have become dire enough to finally reach the mainstream press. A recent AP article starts, "**Unless someone or something stops it soon, the mysterious killer that is wiping out many of the nation's honeybees could have a devastating effect on America's dinner plate**, perhaps even reducing us to a glorified bread-and-water diet."

Honeybees' pollination is essential to much of what we eat, including many of our tastiest foods, such as apples, peaches, strawberries, avocados, broccoli, and much more.

Even cattle (feeding on alfalfa) and chocolate (from the cacao plant) depend on bees. According to a Congressional study, honeybees add \$15 billion a year in value to our food supply.



However, bees are now dying at increasingly alarming rates. In the past few months, U.S. beekeepers have lost one-quarter of their colonies due to "Colony Collapse Disorder." A USDA official wonders if bees can weather this storm at all.

What is killing off the bees? Causes discussed include toxics, natural habitat destruction, the stress of industrial beekeeping, GMO's toxic pollen, and cell phone radiation. The AP author says it could be that the bees' genes "do not equip them to fight poisons and disease very well." How interesting to blame the bees' genes, not ourselves, for the harm caused by man-made toxics that are known to both kill and weaken bees, making them more vulnerable to disease.

Often we're told that we need to use toxic pesticides to grow food, feed people, and save money. But the bees' deaths reveal the flaws in this math. A beekeeper I once interviewed said, "**If you want expensive food, try having no bees.**"

It seems clear to me that we're contributing to the bees' demise and thus need to change our ways if we want to save the bees, feed ourselves, and experience nature's wonder.

You can help nurture the bees by: avoiding toxics, planting native flowers, protecting habitat, and buying organic food and honey from the farmers who let the bees live in natural harmony.

SOURCE: "Honeybee die-off threatens food supply," <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070502/ap_on_sc/honeybee_die_off_6> • "A world without bees is a world without chocolate," <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/03/03/HOGIROCUE71.DTL>>



Summer Earth Savers

Protecting Our Waters

The popular summer ritual of lovingly washing the car until it sparkles can cause unintended harm by sending soapy pollution into our creeks and hurting local ecosystems.

A better solution? Take your car to a carwash where water is collected and reused.

This is just one of the many ways that our daily actions can cumulatively help or harm our local water systems. Almost every product we use outside ends up being washed into storm drains, either through water flows or winter rains, and from there goes straight into local waterways without pre-treatment.

Other ways you can help protect our water and environment are by: preventing oil, gas, and antifreeze leaks from cars; avoiding toxic pesticide and fertilizer use in yards; washing paints and stains in sinks not outside; and properly disposing of toxics and pet waste. We can all be part of the solution!

For more, see <www.rwater shed.org/stormwater.html>.

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Letting the Sun Shine In

Another joy of summer is letting the beautiful bright sunshine inside. But, if you use a mainstream window cleaner, you could also be unnecessarily bringing toxic ammonia into your home, risking harm to everyone's eyes and lungs.

The alternative is easy. In a spray bottle, mix 1/4 cup of white distilled vinegar, 2 cups of water, and 1/2 teaspoon of liquid soap or detergent. Shake and use. The liquid soap is the key to making the windows dry more quickly and easily.

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Less-Toxic Mosquito Protection

Contrary to the usual advice, you don't have to use the toxic DEET to protect you and your family from mosquitoes. For more about effective mosquito protection without toxics, see TNS VI/4. Our past issue index is at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>.

Seeing Through Green Eyes

In our annual survey, **a reader wanted to know more about "green remodeling that isn't for millionaires."**

Luckily, green doesn't have to cost more. It can *seem* that it does right now, given the media's focus on buying new green *products*, which can be more expensive. (Is it a coincidence that their focus on products lets them attract new advertisers?)

And, yes, if you're going to buy a new product, it's generally better to choose one with some kind of ecological pedigree. (To avoid hype, check the label to clarify what exactly makes a product green.)

But if your goal is to be green, to lessen your impact on the earth, and especially if you want to save money, **I suggest you think first about how to avoid buying a new product at all.** Instead, follow the eco-mantra — **"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle."** Then what you do to be green can also save you money!

Because, while new green products are helpful, we won't stop our harm to the earth if we continue consuming at our current rate, even if all the products are called "green."

So ask yourself, **"What's my goal with this project? Can I use what I have, just in a different way?** Can I repair, refurbish, or repaint to refresh the look and match my new design? Is there an opportunity for creative expression here?" I recently did this with an old porch table, repainting it in a way that delights me every time I see it.

If you do decide to buy something, look first at other people's discards. This will save you money, avoid the eco-impacts of producing and shipping new products, and reduce landfill waste. You can also often find unique pieces that bring style to your home — and even interact with interesting people along the way!



I recently got a great chair at Recycletown (at the dump) for \$5. It didn't look like much, but I saw good lines and knew that some (non-toxic) stain and a new seat cloth would make it look amazing, which it does. It's fun seeing what a little creativity can do. I'd have to pay a lot at an antique store to get something with its great classic design!

Recycletown has household items, tiles, doors, windows, plastic gardening pots, bikes, exercise equipment, and more, all at great prices. Go at least once so you have a sense of what's there.

Other good sources of used items include local papers, thrift stores, and garage sales. Also look online, for instance at <www.waccobb.net> and <www.craigslist.com>. Or post a request and see what comes out of someone's attic! You can also check out <www.pressdemocrat.com>.

A great resource that few know about is Sonomax <www.recycle.now.org/sonomax>. Here, businesses offer free or cheap items in order to avoid disposal fees. Recent listings include red bricks, windows, window coverings, carpet, drywall, sinks, doors, insulation, appliances, red lava rock, paint, redwood, and compost.

Once you start looking, you'll be amazed at how many used resources there are, locally and beyond!

Have questions about going green? Email them to me and perhaps you'll find your answers in future issues!

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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Q: Where can I throw away old batteries?

A: Congratulations for knowing that batteries don't go in the garbage, because their toxic metals would leach from landfills to poison our environment and water supply. Even a small amount can spread and do a great deal of harm.

You can get good information on how to properly dispose of batteries and other toxic items at the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's website <www.recyclenow.org>, phone book recycling section, and help desk (707) 565-DESK (3375).

Their website list of battery dropoff points includes Sebastopol's Longs Drugs, which accepts alkaline (regular) and rechargeable batteries at the photo department. Tape both battery ends and put in a plastic bag. Many other retailers accept rechargeable batteries, including Best Buy, Home Depot, and Radio Shack. Sebastopol Hardware accepts NiCad batteries, less than two pounds.

You can also dispose of batteries and other toxics at the Household Toxics Waste Facility (at the dump, between Cotati and Petaluma) or at Community Toxics Collection days (which are held around the county). Sebastopol's upcoming collection days are 7/24, 11/13, and 1/22/08. See the website for more information.

Businesses can get a convenient mail order battery recycling service for themselves or customers (for a small fee) at <www.biggreenbox.com> or call (877) 461-2345.

To reduce your battery waste, consider getting a recharger and rechargeable batteries. Some rechargers can also renew alkaline batteries. If you buy alkalines, consider Fuji's "green" (no mercury) variety. Big Lots in Santa Rosa has them at a great price. It's ecological and economical!

