Thank you for your feedback!

Several readers indicated that they’re committed to not using any toxic materials, which is great. Folks also told us that they’re using soapy water to handle aphids, and vinegar instead of toxic materials for housecleaning and managing weeds. One reader said that they stopped using Roundup about eight years ago, “after your article on how it [harms] frogs.... We now have many more frogs again in our urban ‘farm’.” How wonderful!

Congratulations to everyone who’s finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics. With these choices, you’re supporting a healthier environment for yourself, your family, and our community.

Additionally, as always, we appreciate your acknowledgment of our work. We’re delighted to be of assistance.

Please keep your feedback coming! Your input helps us create a newsletter that’s useful for you!

“Thanks for the newsletter, I always read and enjoy it. Blessings,”
~ JB, Sebastopol

Did You Know?

The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, it costs about $100 a year plus in-house copying. This is a bargain for our health, now and long into the future.
Cultivating Lush & Healthy Garden Soil

Two readers asked for more information about building garden soil, both to prevent pests and produce more abundant yields.

This seemingly simple inquiry actually reveals a key point about nontoxic living: that it goes beyond just swapping in less-toxic products to kill pests. Idealy, it’s also a different way of thinking that acts to avoid problems by nurturing strong and healthy systems from the start.

In the domain of gardening, this healthy approach starts with healthy soil. So how do you create that?

1) Buy soil products and amendments that are allowed on organic farms, which often have an “OMRI” seal. This avoids the toxics allowed in mainstream fertilizers.

2) Identify which products will best nurture your particular soil and plants. For instance, compost can loosen soil and increase drainage and biological activity; it’s especially useful if your soil is high in clay. Also consider adding other nutrients such as bone meal, rock minerals, or kelp. Some plants are “heavy feeders,” such as tomatoes and corn, and benefit from specific fertilizer types, both at planting and during their growing season.

For more specific advice, bring a soil sample to an eco-nursery such as Harmony Farm Supply (823-9125, www.harmonyfarm.com). Or get a soil test, to better target your garden investments. For more amendment ideas, see www.extremelygreen.com/fertilizerguide.cfm.

3) Compost your food scraps to create your own luscious fertilizer (and notably reduce your garbage volume). More about doing this is at www.healthyworld.org/joysofcompost.html.

More Ideas for Detoxing Cookware

In my previous article, “Detoxing Cookware,” I answered a reader’s question about nonstick pans, which are a potential source of the perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) being found in most of our bodies. My advice? Avoid nonstick pans when possible (using glass, enamel, and stainless steel instead); appropriately buy and care for any nonsticks you do use; and identify and reduce your other PFC exposure sources.

I also invited readers to share their positive experiences with the new “green” nonstick pans. A few folks did, so I thought I’d pass those thoughts along as further input.

For instance, one reader said that she loves cooking eggs in her Scan-Pan, which “has lasted many years without the surface scratching.” I researched and found that Scan-Pan’s Green Tek product has a ceramic-titanium nonstick surface, is PFOA-free, and allows the use of metal tools. While this pan seems like a decent option overall, I wouldn’t give it a perfect grade because it doesn’t identify its nonstick polymer, only avoids one PFC (PFOA), and doesn’t provide its specific care information online.

A friend of mine also recently raved about her Cuisinart Green-Gourmet nonstick frying pan, which she says is “a dream to cook with and clean up.” The surface is hard-anodized aluminum with a petroleum-free ceramic-based nonstick coating that doesn’t contain PFOA or PTFE. So this seems to be a slighter better option to consider.

A few readers also emailed me about their passion for cast iron pans, which they find to be nonstick when properly seasoned. I don’t personally use these pans, because of their weight and special care needs, and I don’t know that they offer the convenience that folks seek with nonstick pans. However, I pass that along as another option.

I also want to mention one reader’s suggestion of using bamboo cooking utensils as natural non-scratching tools. What a good idea!