

THE NEXT STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Blackberry Boundaries

Ah, blackberries. Such a delight in the warm summer sun, a transporting bit of yummy wildness.

But what if blackberry bushes are spreading into places you don't want them? Especially if you don't want to use a toxic herbicide? These herbicides can indeed risk harm to users, children, and pets; poison your land; and compromise future planting in those areas.

Winter is a good time to get your blackberries under control, when the plants are dormant and the roots easier to dig up in damp soil.

What You Can Do

1) Small patches can usually be addressed with clippers and a trowel or shovel. It's ideal to act on these as early as possible.

2) For eradicating larger areas, here's a common less-toxic method:

■ Cut back the plants.

■ Either dig out their roots and crowns (as much as you can), and/or pour horticultural vinegar into the roots. (This stronger vinegar is at nurseries and hardware stores.)

■ Check periodically for sprouts and uproot them.

"As always The Next STEP is filled with useful information.

This time, so appropriate to food-centered holiday celebrations, about the best ways to store food.

Thank you."

~ Carol Goodwin Blick

Helpful tips:

■ **This method is similar to one often used with toxic herbicides.** We're just pouring vinegar into the roots instead of herbicide.

■ **Wear long sleeves and pants,** socks, shoes, and gloves. Denim clothing and leather gloves help!

■ **Various specialized tools** can improve speed and results.

■ **If you're clearing a larger area,** it could be worth getting more serious digging equipment.

■ **You can get help** with both the planning and the tasks here.

3) **Some other methods people have used successfully are:**

■ **Goats.** You can even rent these! They eat the plants above ground, can work on sloped areas, and save you from hauling cuttings. You just need to then address the roots.

■ **Solarizing.** Here you cut back the plants, wet the soil, cover with black or clear plastic, and tack down the edges. **The sun's heat builds up** underneath to kill the plants. It works for weeds too! Most beneficial microbes and earthworms survive. A local woman who did this has kept her blackberries away for four years.

This approach **is best with six hours a day of summer sun.** You can start the preparation now. More details are at <https://bit.ly/3spg1V1>.

■ **Sheet mulch.** With this, you cut back the plants, wet the soil, and cover with overlapping (plain uncolored) cardboard. Then water it, walk on it, and cover with 3" to 4" of organic matter, such as compost or

See **Blackberries**, over



It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating 21 years of publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)*!

Now we need your help! Please fill out the easy enclosed survey card to give us your feedback about our efforts. (This card is also in the City's online bill paying system, at the bottom of the My Bill tab.)

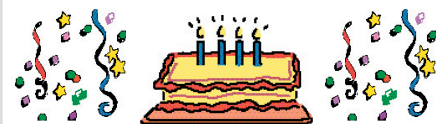
Our goal with this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone by reducing our exposure to toxics.

So we help folks reduce the toxics used in our homes, schools, parks, businesses, food, ecosystems, and more.

TNS is produced by a small team of local citizens, working on a volunteer basis (which keeps costs very low) because we support this goal. We're grateful to the City Council and staff for acting in the community's best interest with this project.

Also let us know how we can best support your toxics reduction in the coming year, including any questions, tips, story ideas, or success stories.

We want to hear from you! Your support truly makes this project possible. Thank you!



Did You Know?

The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, its primary cost is copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$19 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our shared health, now and long into the future.

Detoxing Fabrics

Something good is sneaking into our textile labels, and I'm glad to share it with you.

I've previously talked about the toxics in clothes — which I discovered when I had a toxic reaction to new sweats! It took a year of washing and testing before I could wear them. I've since found that many fabrics can have toxics, including sheets, blankets, curtains, towels, mattresses, baby clothes and bedding, and more!

According to *The Ecologist* magazine, "an estimated eight thousand chemicals are employed to transform raw materials into clothes, a process that includes bleaching, dyeing, scouring, sizing, and finishing the fabrics." But there's usually no way to know what's there. (See **Clothes** in the *Index*, Issue XII/5.)

Can We Just Buy Organic?

As with food, buying textiles from organically-grown fibers is a great way to reduce toxic pesticides in our personal and shared environment. However, even organic fibers can have toxics added after they leave the farm.

Look for More on the Label

So also look on product labels for less-toxic processing features. I've been delighted to see these more and more, even from mainstream manufacturers and at reasonable price points. That light-

ens both our toxic and investigation loads.

It's even better if a product label lists a processing certification from a third-party. Here are two top certifications:

■ **GOTS-certified.** This highly-respected standard starts with organic fibers. A product labelled with GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) must contain at least 70% certified organic fibers. An "organic" GOTS product must have at least 95% certified organic fibers.

Plus, GOTS limits toxics at all production phases, including manufacturing, packaging, and distribution. It prohibits many chemicals used in conventional textile production, including formaldehyde, flame retardants, heavy metals, PFCs, etc. Toxic chemical residues aren't allowed on GOTS certified clothes. GOTS also has environmental and worker protections. www.global-standard.org. Find suppliers here <https://bit.ly/3qec9U6>.

■ **Oeko-Tex certified.** A product gets Oeko-Tex Standard 100 certification when testing shows it doesn't have above-limit levels of 100 substances harmful to human health. This includes formaldehyde, nickel, solvents, and azo dyes. So it's evaluated by residue levels, not usage. Certified fabric isn't necessarily organic, unless it says so. www.oeko-tex.com/en

How amazing it is for me to open a textile product and not be hit with a toxic smell. That's as it should be!

ADDED SOURCE: www.sustainably-chic.com/blog/what-is-gots-certified

Local Toxics Disposal

■ The next Sebastopol Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collection Events are January 4 and April 5, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. Or email toxicsdisposal@cleanharbors.com.

■ For more about local toxics disposal, see www.zerowastesonoma.gov or call 707/565-3375.

Blackberries, continued

mulch. Water well and keep moist. All these materials will break down into soil. If you find sprouts, remove and add more cardboard and dirt. A local person said that this worked for their backyard full of blackberries.

Sheet mulch is a great all purpose plant suppressor, and keeps soil moist. Great details are at <https://bit.ly/30KIitS>. For an article comparing sheet mulching and solarizing, see <https://nyti.ms/3J6IdSs>.

■ **Plastic root barrier.** Dig a trench and put in a root barrier, to stop the roots from spreading where you don't want them.

4) **Disposal. Don't put blackberry cuttings into your compost pile, unless you want to put effort into managing them.** The thorns don't easily decompose without shredding. www.carryoncomposting.com/142941472

I hope that you find this information helpful. And I invite you to tell me — what's worked best for you?

~ Patricia Dines

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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Printed on recycled paper.

Easier Toxics Dropoff

Bringing your toxics to a Sebastopol HHW Collection Event just got a little easier. You can now make your dropoff appointment online!

Simply go the web page <https://bit.ly/3q4OB3S>, find the desired event on the calendar, click on it, and follow the prompt. You can do this up to two months in advance! And you can still call or email, if you prefer. In any case, make your appointment at least 24 hours in advance.

- • • • •
- Got a pest problem? •
- Or a toxics question? •
- The STEP Online Index can help! It's easy to look up your topic and find our well-researched, condensed, and useful information—to help you get up-to-speed and into action. It also makes it easy to share this information! •
- www.healthyworld.org/STEP •
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