Keeping a Healthy Home

Many common household cleaners contain toxics that can cause health problems for your family and pets, through daily use and accidental poisonings. Read the warnings on the labels! For instance:

■ **Ammonia**, found in many cleaners, is an irritant and can cause damage to skin, eyes, and respiratory passages. Ingestion can be corrosive to the mouth, esophagus, and stomach.

■ **Chlorine**, found in bleach and other cleaners, is a toxic gas that’s been used as a weapon in war! It’s a strong irritant to mucous membranes and can cause coughing, choking, tearing, headache, dizziness – even pulmonary edema, bronchospasm, and death. It’s corrosive and can burn skin and damage eyes and other membranes.

Other potentially harmful ingredients found in cleansers include: *lye, formaldehyde, nitrobenzene, phenol, kerosene, naphthalene, pentachlorophenol, perchloroethylene, petroleum distillates, artificial dyes, and fragrances.*

Luckily, you can keep your house just as clean using less-toxic materials! In fact, you can clean almost any part of your house using *vinegar, liquid soap, baking soda,* and *Bon Ami cleaning powder.* Doesn’t *that* make your supply cabinet lighter! And using these ingredients reduces packaging waste, keeps your home smelling great – and saves you money! For instance, you can:

■ **Clean your bathroom and kitchen surfaces** by mixing a natural biodegradable liquid soap and water in a container, then cleaning with a sponge or cloth. For more scrubbing action, put baking soda on your sponge. And Bon Ami can keep your porcelain clean without the chlorine found in other brands.

■ **Wash your windows** by mixing 1/4 cup vinegar, 2 cups of water, and 1/2 teaspoon of liquid soap in a spray bottle.

■ **Deodorize your carpets** by scattering baking soda, waiting an hour, then vacuuming.

■ **Clean your drain** by pouring in 1/2 cup baking soda then 3 cups boiling water. For more of a “kick”, pour 1/2 cup baking soda then 1/2 cup vinegar and cover the drain. They combust together (a fun science experiment for kids of any age!) After 15 minutes, rinse with hot water.

There are an amazing number of cleaning solutions using simple, inexpensive ingredients. To help you make a healthy home, we’ll be covering them in future issues. Please send us your tips and questions.

Two notes: When making your concoctions, you can reuse old commercial product bottles; just wash them out well and label them with the new contents. Also, nontoxic does *not* mean you should leave it around for a toddler to drink!


~ Patricia Dines with Rebecca Dwan
Building Sebastopol’s Soil: The City Council’s Biodegradable Resolution

Recently, the Sebastopol City Council voted unanimously to support a resolution requiring that, on city property, only materials that will biodegrade be used for landscaping. There are two exceptions: (1) for irrigation supplies, and (2) for poly-weed cloth that’s used as a temporary weed suppressant, if it’s later removed.

The resolution also states that the city will end its use of pressure-treated wood for tree stakes when the current supply runs out, thus reducing the harm to the soil and ourselves from the toxic materials in this wood.

This resolution is a major step to rebuilding the topsoil on city property, which is the bank account of nutrition for future vibrant and beautiful plant growth.

~ Craig Litwin

Come Nurture Plants With Us!

You’re invited to come nurture plants with us! On Sun., Jan. 6 and Sun., Feb. 3, from 12-4pm, Planting Earth Activation (PEA) and STEP will be meeting at the Sebastopol Community Garden to propagate plants for future plantings on city property. Head east on Laguna Parkway past the movie theatre. Pass Flynn St. and the garden is on the left. We’ll be in the greenhouse. Also, on Sun., March 3, 12-4pm, we’re meeting at the Sebastopol police station to continue landscaping there.

City Council Recognizes Patricia Dines for Community Service

At the Nov. 20 Sebastopol City Council meeting, Mayor Larry Robinson presented Patricia Dines with a proclamation recognizing her for “outstanding service in the community as an advocate and proactive role model for a culture without toxics.”

Included was recognition for Ms. Dines’ work helping launch and editing The Next STEP newsletter, as well as for her “contribution to the greater community” by publishing The Organic Guide to Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino Counties and other community projects.

Said Ms. Dines, “I think it’s wonderful that this City Council, and the previous one, have had the vision to create and encourage the STEP program, with the support of members of the community. It’s a real pleasure to work with Craig Litwin and Rebecca Dwan in creating The Next STEP newsletter, and to share with others what we’ve found out about toxics and alternatives — so that we can all have healthier, more joyful lives.”

~ Craig Litwin

Enjoy the New Covert Lane Landscaping!

The City Council recently approved funds to re-landscape the median strips on Covert Lane (near the Ragle Park entrance). The old landscaping was diseased and dying, infested with moths, and not drought-resistant.

The re-landscaping project was designed through a collaborative effort including Dante Del Prete from the Public Works Department, Craig Litwin representing Planting Earth Activation (PEA), and Becky Duckles, the City’s contract arborist. The plan was presented to and approved by both the Design Review Board and the City Council, and included drought-resistant plants; a diverse selection to provide color in specific areas; and extensive mulch.

The project is nearing completion, and so far is within budget due to Dante’s efforts in pursuing donations of plants and mulch, and in coordinating volunteers to assist with the work. The City can be proud to show off this newly landscaped area that was made possible through a community effort!

~ Rich Emig
Public Works Superintendent

The Garden Corner

Every day of the year there are plants that we can put in the ground and enjoy the rewards later on. Here are some wonderful treats you can plant now!

- **Bare Root**: Fruit trees, perennial flowers, roses, cane berries, grapes, artichokes, asparagus, strawberries.
- **Transplant**: Leeks, onions, spinach, cabbage, mustard, yarrow, lavender, sage, hollyhock, foxglove.

This is also a good time to **prune** fruit trees, roses, vines, berries – and start or continue your compost pile.

SOURCE: *Gardening by the Moon Calendar*
You can get your own copy at local garden supply stores like Frizzle-Ends, Bassignani Nursery, and Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery.