

# THE NEXT **STEP** Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



## Easy Answers

■ You can get answers to some of your survey questions about toxics and alternatives via **The STEP Online Index** at [www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html). All our past issues are there. Just look up your desired subject to read what we've written on that topic. For instance, we have articles under these **bolded** words.

- Healthier **housecleaning and gardening**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mosquitoes, fleas, weeds, poison oak, blackberries, rodents, and mold**
- Methodologies that avoid toxics, like **permaculture** and **IPM**
- Evaluations of specific toxics, including **Roundup** and **2,4-D**
- Evidence of human and pet **health problems related to toxics, including pesticides**

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day is on Tuesday August 15**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, see [www.recyclenow.org](http://www.recyclenow.org) or call 707/565-3375.

■ **Anyone can get the STEP newsletter by email.** Sign up at [www.healthyworld.org/EList](http://www.healthyworld.org/EList). Feel free to share this with others!

■ **Please let us know if you have a toxics question, article idea, or success story!**

## Thank You For Your Feedback!



**Thank you to all the Sebastopol residents who took the time to send in your STEP Survey cards.** We appreciate hearing your thoughts about the newsletter, including how you use it and what articles you'd like to see in the future.

So, what were your responses?

■ **90% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Very," "You are doing a great job!!" and "Keep on keeping on."

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **23% said that you use pesticides at home or work, a big drop from last year's 39%. Of those using pesticides, 50% use just natural/nontoxic pesticides, 8% use synthetic/toxic products, and 42% use both.**

■ We're delighted that **75% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce or avoid the use of toxics**, an increase from last year. That really makes our work feel worthwhile!

For instance, readers reported that our information has helped you properly dispose of "old medicines and toxics like paint," skip using Roundup, and apply vinegar instead of toxic herbicides. It's also helped you avoid toxics in sunblocks, dryer sheets, Christmas trees, and managing "ants and garden pests."

One reader said, "I learned how to control weeds naturally." (Yay!) Another said, "I use vinegar for just about everything" (and it is indeed

a handy material for many household uses).

Others said, "This information helps deter my mom from using pesticides," and "Excellent replacements, great reminders." Another expressed appreciation for the "moral support." How wonderful!

**Congratulations to everyone who's finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics. With these choices, you're supporting a healthier and safer water supply, town, and environment for yourself, your family, and our community.** What we do in our daily lives really does help to create our world!

**Also thank you for your excellent questions and ideas for future articles;** you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

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!

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"I really appreciate getting *The Next STEP* Newsletter with all the good information. And I appreciate that you are spreading the word about healthier choices for families and homes!"

~ A STEP Reader

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### Did You Know?

**The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing.** It's a bonus for you, created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense. It costs about \$165 a year plus in-house copying, which is a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$11 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.

## Choosing Safer Bouquets

**Are you buying flowers for Mother's Day, graduation, or home décor? Reduce the toxic exposure for yourself and others by seeking organic and "no pesticide" options.** Unfortunately, mainstream flowers can be doused with toxic pesticides during growing and shipping, and regulations are less-protective than for food. Read our story, with more information and healthier local sources, by going to **Flowers** in the STEP Index.

You can also learn more about the reality of the global flower business in the book *Flower Confidential* by Amy Stewart, [www.amystewart.com/books/flower-confidential](http://www.amystewart.com/books/flower-confidential).

Another local eco-option is First Light Farm in Petaluma, which offers a certified organic casual You-Pick flower patch, June-Oct. Bring cash. [www.facebook.com/firstlightcsa](http://www.facebook.com/firstlightcsa).

## Evaluating Your Home & Garden Products

**As you enjoy your spring gardening, DIY projects, and preparation for summer fun, be sure to read product labels carefully before purchase and use.** Seek to avoid those with the legal keywords Danger and Warning. Consider and take seriously the other warnings on the label; they indicate risks of harm. Also, look beyond the labels to understand the chronic risks. And follow all safety directions.

### 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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Additionally, ask your lawn service or landscaper to get your permission before using any product, so you can evaluate whether you want it on your land. For more on this, look in our Index under **Pesticides & Toxics: Assessing toxicity**.

## Detoxing Your Weeding

Too often in our wars with weeds we unnecessarily expose ourselves, our families, our pets, and our land to toxic materials. Here are a few ways you can play it safer this year.

### Keeping toxics off your lawn

■ **Skip the "weed and feed" lawn products. Do you know that they likely include toxic herbicides** that can harm you, anyone at your house, your pets, and your ecosystem? They're not just fertilizers!

These combo products aren't even a smart approach for your lawn, because each material should have its own timing and application protocol. That was the reason Canada gave for banning them in 2010. ([www.thespruce.com/canada-bans-weed-n-feed-products-3969993](http://www.thespruce.com/canada-bans-weed-n-feed-products-3969993).)

These weedkillers can also kill beneficial organisms. Plus, says turf-care expert Kelly Burke, most popular brands use a high nitrogen fertilizer that encourages top growth but doesn't nurture the plant's health and vigor. ([www.thespruce.com/controversial-weed-n-feed-2152853](http://www.thespruce.com/controversial-weed-n-feed-2152853))

Read more at [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol15no3.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol15no3.pdf).

■ **If you still want a "weed and feed," find one with non-toxic ingredients.** Avoid those with toxic herbicides such as 2,4-D, dicamba, and mecoprop/MCPP.

■ **Prevent weeds from the start by nurturing a healthy lawn.** Burke notes that weeds often reveal underlying problems. For more about creating a healthy lawn, see the STEP Index under **Lawn Care**, and [www.thespruce.com/organic-weed-control-2153150](http://www.thespruce.com/organic-weed-control-2153150).

### Learning about herbicides and alternatives

■ **For more on 2-4,D, glyphosate (Roundup), and other common**

**pesticides**, see NCAP's scientific and readable fact sheets at [www.pesticide.org/pesticide\\_factsheets](http://www.pesticide.org/pesticide_factsheets).

■ **Also see "12 Ways to Get Rid of Weeds Without Using Roundup"** at [www.ecowatch.com/12-ways-to-get-rid-of-weeds-without-using-roundup-1891166153.html](http://www.ecowatch.com/12-ways-to-get-rid-of-weeds-without-using-roundup-1891166153.html). They suggest that you can instead: Mulch, hand-dig weeds, plant stronger competitive plants, selectively water and fertilize your land, solarize (cover an area with plastic), and minimize tilling. They also advise considering vinegar, soap, boiling water, corn gluten meal, and a flame weeder. I'd add sheet mulch to that list; look for that in the STEP Index.

■ **For more weed management info**, see **Weeds** in our Index.

## Eating Your Weeds, Redux

In our prior issue, we described common "weeds" that have traditionally been eaten and used for healing. Sebastopol plant lover, seed saver, and Master Gardener Marilyn Madrone responded by sharing some of her current favorite wild salads with me. I was inspired just reading about her healthy treats!

She said, "At this writing, my salad is dandelion, chickweed, quinoa, and a European import called mâche — with shredded carrots and onion greens. Yesterday's salad was a huge amount of tender dandelion greens with goat chevre, quinoa, dried cranberries, sunflower seeds, carrots and onion greens." She added, "Dandelion is a best friend. One leaf of it and any of last evening's foolish eating is forgotten." Good to know!

She suggested that we explore these summer "weed" herbs, when their leaves are young: **purslane** (full of essential fatty acid omega-3s), **lamb's quarters** (a quinoa), and **pigweed** (an amaranth).

To learn more about identifying and eating these plants, see [www.livescience.com/15322-healthiest-backyard-weeds.html](http://www.livescience.com/15322-healthiest-backyard-weeds.html) and [www.ediblewildfood.com/pigweed.aspx](http://www.ediblewildfood.com/pigweed.aspx). **Before eating any wild plant**, always be sure that you've identified it right and understand any risks!