June, 2010
Volume X, Number 2

The ULS Report™

Helping people Use Less Stuff™ *by conserving resources and reducing waste.*

Green Thumbs Up

By Robert Lilienfeld, Editor

The warm weather is finally upon us and our thoughts have turned to gardening. Here are some great ideas that will help you keep your garden green while keeping the local environment green, as well.

Start with Indigenous Species

One of the best ways to enjoy a green garden is by planting what are known as indigenous species – those that are natural to the area. These types of plants have learned to naturally deal with our climate, soil, and pests, so they thrive without too much help from us.

Pest Control without Pesticides

Pests are part of the natural landscape. As such, our goal is not to eradicate them, but to reduce the chance that they will harm fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Try these ideas:

Groundhogs and Rabbits

- Sprinkle Epsom salt on plants, as groundhogs dislike the taste.
- Mix dog hair into the soil near plants, as it will keep rodents away.
- Spray plants with natural repellents like hot pepper or garlic.

Slugs

- Create a beer trap by using a shallow container (reuse a sour cream container) and burying it even with the soil. Fill two-thirds full with beer.
- Put lemon rinds in the garden. Slugs will flock to them. Scoop up the rinds and the slugs.
- Spray plants with a water/garlic mixture.

Grubs

- Purchase nematodes, as they prey on grubs. Apply them on wet, warm nights.
- Attract worm-eating birds like robins to your garden area. Use a bird bath, or leave out raisins or berries.
- Stop watering your lawn in late summer, as it is egg laying season. Without water, grub eggs die.

Use Water Wisely

It is important to use water wisely, and to save it whenever possible. Start by turning off sprinklers if it has recently rained or is about to rain. If you do water, turn sprinklers on when the sun is down, and water deeply. Also, spread compost on your lawn and garden, as it increases the water-holding capacity of sandy soils.

Two great ways to conserve water are by building a rain barrel or creating a water garden. Both help you get the most use out of rainwater, rather than having it simply go down the storm sewer.

Compost

Benefits of composting include:

- Enhanced permeability of clay soils
- Reduced use of chemical fertilizers
- Slow release of nutrients
- Improved soil structure
- Suppression of certain soil-borne diseases
- Reduced soil erosion

Getting started is easy. Choose a spot away from wooden structures including homes, garages and fences. You'll want a spot with good drainage, but near enough to a hose that the pile can be moistened if necessary.

A simple 3'x3'x3' pile will do. Cover with plastic when it rains to keep it from getting drenched. (Waterlogged piles smell.) If you prefer an enclosed composter, there are many good ones on the market, including those made from 100% recycled plastic.

Next, keep in mind what you can and cannot put in the pile. Fruits, vegetables, skins, peels and husks are fine. So are leaves, grass clippings, and small branches. (Stay away from heavy sticks and weeds that have gone to seed.) DO NOT include meats, dairy products or eggs. You'll attract all sorts of nasty things like flies, maggots and hungry animals.

Now it's time to stockpile the materials, outside of the bin if you're using one. Start with leaves, wood mulch, grass clippings, shredded paper, pine needles and cones. You'll also need a starter such as bagged compost or manure.

Layer the various ingredients outside the bin, watering each layer as you go. Think green and brown when you layer. Brown items provide carbon and green ones add nitrogen. Make sure to add some bulky items like wood chips to keep the pile loose.

Next, fork the layers into the bin, mixing as you go. Blend wet with dry and water as necessary to make the entire pile moist and damp, but not soggy. Add table scraps at this time or over the next few weeks.

Aeration is critical. The old method of aerating by continually turning doesn't work as well as a continuous ventilation process. Use a dowel or broom handle to poke the pile from top to bottom in a number of places. This will set up convection currents that will do the work for you.

Active composting will begin within 48 hours. The pile will cook by itself, with temperatures in the 120 to 150 degree range. Stir once a week and add water as necessary to keep moist. You'll soon see steam rising, indicating an active pile. In about three weeks, the steam will stop and the pile will cool. Contents will be brown and crumbly. It's time to put your newly made compost to work in the beds and on the lawn.

Focus on Packaging

Postconsumer Recycled Plastic Study

For many years, recycling advocates have asserted that it makes both economic and ecologic sense to recycle high volume consumer plastic packaging used both at home and in out-of-home applications. Until now, there has been little data to support this contention. Given the increasing demand for recycled plastic resins and a growing interest in sustainable packaging, a scientific analysis of the environmental impact of recycled plastics is a valuable tool for all involved stakeholders.

In an effort to determine the environmental merits of plastic bottle recycling, four associations collaborated on the fielding of a Life Cycle Inventory (LCI) Study that examines the relative environmental impacts of virgin vs. recycled High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) and Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) resins. The groups are The Plastics Division of the American Chemistry Council, The Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers (APR), the National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR), and the PET Resin Association (PETRA.)

For reference, HDPE is widely used in containers such as milk jugs and detergent bottles, while PET is the primary resin used to produce soft drink and water bottles. Thanks to both curbside recycling programs and bottle deposit laws, these two plastics are easy for consumers to recycle.

The study was performed by Franklin Associates and indicated that *postconsumer recycling of PET and HDPE resins has a positive impact on the overall environmental footprint associated with the production, use and disposal of these materials*. This conclusion was based on the fact that energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and solid waste were significantly lower for recycled resins than for their virgin counterparts. (Read our review and the full study.)

Based upon this study, consumer recycling of packaging made primarily from PET or HDPE should be encouraged among consumers, municipalities, businesses, and government. Turning old water and soda bottles, milk jugs, and detergent containers into new products — especially durable products like decking and industrial packaging just makes good sense environmentally and economically.

Plus, businesses that manufacture products from recycled resins should actively promote the fact that they are doing so. The best way to reinforce the value of plastics recycling is for consumers to experience and use products made from recycled resins. Businesses should highlight this use on their products and packaging.

The ULS Report

4853 Goodison Place Drive
Rochester, MI 48306
248-726-9729
www.use-less-stuff.com
info@use-less-stuff.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Robert M. Lilienfeld
TECHNICAL ADVISOR EMERITUS: Dr. William Rathje

We welcome your comments and story ideas.
Contact Bob Lilienfeld: bob@use-less-stuff.com.
Post on our blog: www.uls-report.blogspot.com.
Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/UseLessStuff.