

Save Money...

Save the Planet.

Frugal Green

April 2009



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starting a
home orchard**

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money



Save
the planet



Cover Story:

Next to planting a garden, having your own fruit orchard is a great way to save on groceries. Our backyard orchardist expert shares tips for this challenging but rewarding venture: Page 3.

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It is on the farm that I honestly feel my roots. I can sit under a tree that is marked on the original deed for the land my great-great-great-great-great grandfather signed. I can ride on the tractor my great-grandfather bought and my father keeps fixing, much to the detriment of his patience and blood pressure.

FRUGAL GREEN

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Your feedback is important

Frugal Green is about building a local community of readers who enjoy saving money and the planet; who understand resources are both precious and finite; who shop locally and support home-grown service providers and businesses.

We encourage your feedback and participation:

Do you know someone who has mastered the green lifestyle, who's a super-frugal shopper or has learned to live better on less? We'd love to feature them in a future issue. Give us a name and phone number and we'll take care of the rest.

Do you have tips to share with readers, a nifty idea for living greener or favorite place to save money? Share them with us!

By mail: Frugal Green, attention Carl Feather, c/o Star Beacon, PO Box 2100, Ashtabula, OH 44005-2100.

Every day is Earth Day at this idyllic place

Over a hill taller than most in Ohio is a little valley in Finleyville, Pa.

Six generations of my family have farmed this little piece of the world that gets smaller all the time as huge houses on tiny bits of land make up an unstoppable urban sprawl complete with big-box retailers.



Margie
Trax-Page

green margie

It is on the farm that I honestly feel my roots. I can sit under a tree that is marked on the original deed for the land my great-great-great-great-great grandfather signed. I can ride on the tractor my great-grandfather bought and my father keeps fixing, much to the detriment of his patience and blood pressure. In the middle of the "big pond" next to cider mill, a rarely seen stump is visible only in the driest summers, when long, silver irrigation pipes pump water to crops.

The thing about life on Trax Farm is that every day seems like a new start.

Generations of my ancestors have greeted the morning on this same bit of earth, doing the same old jobs that bring about the same old result. But nothing seems to change and nothing seems to stay the same on the farm.

I wish life were like that everywhere.

My brothers – both bachelor farmers happy to live off my grandmother's table scraps – have a huge advantage in raising their future families. While I work to teach my daughter Emily to recycle and reuse, to love trees and animals and flowers, all my brothers have to do is work another generation of the cycle.

Every day is Earth Day on the farm.

My challenge to myself this year was to live green – from Earth Day 2008 to Earth Day 2009 – and to bring that green living about in an easy, day-to-day way that is as natural as life on the farm.

I pride myself on taking the high road of moderation in this personal go-green movement (though don't ask my husband, he thinks I've gone eco-cuckoo), and I'm glad achievable green was my goal.

So why not "move into a mud house and wear hemp clothes," as my husband so supportively said a year ago? Why not go green to the ultimate level with compost piles and homemade shampoo and electric vehicles?

Because that isn't achievable to the masses, to moms like me who can barely remember her car keys, cell phone and grocery list on a good day. If recycling and reusing isn't achieved in small steps, it might not be achieved at all.

I know that I want my daughter to live a suburban life full of farm logic — minus the rolling hay bales — a life where nothing seems to change and nothing seems to stay the same because we are aware of our impact on the world in all the ways that matter – big and small.

Trax-Page is a Star Beacon staff writer.



CARL E. FEATHER/ Star Beacon

PIERPONT TOWNSHIP apple grower Blaine Brock stands next to one of his mature dwarf apple trees. Proper pruning will produce productive trees like this one and save the home orchardist money every fall.

Start your own Garden of Eatin' with these tips from an experienced apple grower

By **CARL E. FEATHER**

Staff Writer

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With apple prices hovering around \$1.75 a pound or more in many grocery stores, homeowners with a little extra land are thinking about starting a home orchard. Blaine Brock of Pierpont understands that kind of thinking.

"I wanted a hobby," says Brock, who lived in Beaver County, Pa., at the time he planted his first 100 apple trees. "I got into a hobby and it got out of control."

On a little over one acre of land, Brock eventually had 550 fruit trees, all of them dwarf planted on a wire trellis. Each tree produced three to four

bushels of apples, which Brock sold at farm markets before retiring and moving to Pierpont.

At his Route 6 property, Brock cares for several apple and peach trees, just enough to keep his family in fruit. But he retains his expertise in growing fruit and enjoys sharing that knowledge with others who want to jump into this fascinating but challenging hobby. Indeed, after spending some time with Brock, you realize that fruit trees, like marriages, require a long-term commitment if they are going to produce fruit.

Keep in mind that under optimum conditions two to three years will pass before your tree bears its first crop, and it will take five years before it's up to

See APPLES, Page 9

Don't waste money on fertilizer:

Convert your trash into compost, make your garden and world green

Our county's resident composting expert takes the mystery out of what comes naturally

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer
cfeather@starbeacon.com

Here's a simple test to determine just how frugal you are. What did you do with the following items?

- Coffee grounds, grapefruit skins, eggshells, potato skins and onion tops;
- Grass clippings and weeds.
- Leaves you raked up from the flowerbeds;

If any of the above went into trash, you're wasting money. You could have been making free, rich fertilizer from this common household waste by composting.

While most people have heard of composting, few are willing to attempt it because they think it's too difficult, mysterious or smelly, especially if they live

on a small city lot. And, unfortunately, most stores in Ashtabula County don't realize people have a keen interest in the subject. Local retailers have been slow to stock compost bins or offer a meaningful selection, forcing people to buy online.

That's a shame because two popular compost bins are manufactured right here in Ashtabula County. RTS Plastics in Austinburg makes a compost bin that's based upon a design very popular in England. And Covered Bridge, which has a manufacturing facility in Ashtabula, makes the popular Wishing Well bin.

Jim McIntyre of Jefferson Township is the inventor of this 18-cubic-foot capacity bin. The bin stands 30 inches tall and is 36 inches wide. It has brick-like pattern stamped into its side and is constructed from recycled material. It comes with a lid, although McIntyre feels composting generally works better if



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon
JAMES McINTYRE adds kitchen scraps to a compost bin in his back yard. In a few months, he'll be rewarded with rich, dark compost for use in the yard and garden.

See Compost, Page 10

Don't compost this:

Most everything that goes into the waste stream can be composted. Here are things that you DO NOT want to compost:

- Metal, glass, plastic, Styrofoam
- Diseased plants (will spread the problem)
- Pet and human waste (but hair is fine, a great source of nitrogen)
- Sawdust and chips from chemically treated wood
- Some weeds, like morning glory, bindweed, sheep sorrel, ivy, some kinds of grasses, whose seeds will survive the compost pile heat
- Bones, meat, dairy, fatty food wastes

Geneva store brings the surplus-food shopping experience closer to home



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

BETTY AND Dick Thomas (left), with help from their daughter Brooke Annick (second from right), grand-daughter Devan Annick (right) and helper Marti Burgett (center). The store is located at 471 West Main, Geneva, in the Victorian home that previously housed Maltbie's.

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

GENEVA — If you're like most frugal shoppers, you walk down the aisles of the supermarket looking at all those delicious gourmet flavors of coffee and juice, exotic organic cereals and premium varieties of soup, and start salivating. Then you look at the price sticker, put it back on the shelf, reach for the store brand of chicken noodle soup and hope you hit the noodle lottery.

There's good news in Geneva for shoppers like us. A new surplus grocery store at 471 West Main St. seems to specialize in those gourmet and exotic foods, but at surplus-food prices.

For example, I've been wanting to try acai juice for a long time, but was turned away by the \$5-a-quart prices. On the shelves of this new store I found a 32-ounce bottle of organic acai/grape juice for 99 cents.

Notice I said "found." Yep, I bought the only one they had, but I'm sure there are plenty more gourmet and organic bargains to be found on the glass shelves of this down-to-earth store.

Even the name is unpretentious — Surplus Discount Grocery — but the experience is top notch, thanks to the store's friendly owners and former life as Maltbie's, an antique store.

Dick and Betty Thomas, who own the building, and Brooke and Ralph Annick, the Thomas' daughter and son-in-law, came to the realization that a recession is not a good time to be in the antiques business.

"With this economy, everyone is trying to save money," says Brooke, in deciding why they decided to transform their store.

They cleared out the antiques and stocked the shelves with bargain groceries, displayed in two bright, clean rooms with plush carpet. Everything is well organ-

ized so it's easy to find what you're looking for, including those surprises that make shopping at these kinds of stores so much fun.

While these kinds of stores are common in the Amish county of Ashtabula, Trumbull and Geauga counties, this is the first of their kind for the northern neck of our woods.

Two months ago, we reported on a new surplus food grocery in Dodgeville, but that may be too far for northern-county readers who want to save money on gas. The new store in Geneva gives frugal shoppers another option — indeed, one of the shoppers said it has changed her whole shopping procedure. In the past, she went to Marc's and Wal-Mart first, now she's making Surplus Discount Grocery stop number one.

Brooke said one of the things that makes their store unique is their large selection of candy. You can buy four candy bars for a dollar, and energy bars for 75 cents

each. There are bags of candy and gourmet, imported chocolate bars, as well.

"If you can't afford to go out to dinner, you can at least buy a candy bar and feel like you are not being deprived," Brooke says.

Another unique section of this store is stocked with health and beauty aids. The owners got a shipment of salon-brand hair care products by Redken, Rusk, Nexxus and Pureology — again, the kind of stuff you always wanted to try, but ended up with Suave. Most of these items are in the \$2-\$3 range at Surplus Discount Grocery.

Brooke said they did a lot of research before getting into this business and carefully selected the sources for their products. At this time, they are keeping the focus on groceries/health and beauty supplies, with a sprinkling of paper products.

"We came across power tools,

See **SURPLUS**, Page 11

Really dumb ways to waste your money

You make money. You spend money. And hopefully, you save money, too. It can be tough to eliminate unnecessary spending. Many products, activities and services become a part of your life.

The fact is that you probably don't want to let go of any of them. But when the choice is between these comforts and conveniences and your financial health, it's time to make the best decisions and not cling to the very things that keep you from debt-free living and a healthy savings. Each person has his or her own opinion on what they simply won't give up. It's not that they can't. They simply don't want to.

Regardless of where you fall on the frugality spectrum, there's always something you can do to improve your financial future and be less wasteful. You make many choices each and every day. And they are most definitely yours to make and no one else's business. But why not consider making some green and frugal decisions? Frugal people can identify wastefulness with an eagle's eye. I sur-

Frugal Living

by

SARA NOEL

veyed readers and compiled the most popular items they considered to be the dumbest wastes of money.

I'm sure you can come up with some of your own, but here's the top six from the survey.

LENDING MONEY: Don't do it. Most of the time, you'll never see it again.

WEDDINGS: There are many decisions to make when getting married, but you end up just as happy or miserable whether you spend \$50 or \$50,000. Regardless of who is paying for it and whether you can afford it, green weddings are gaining popularity. What makes it different? People have recognized how much waste is produced by a major celebration and want to do their part to minimize it. Consideration is made in the areas of length of transportation required, using home-

grown or locally grown flowers, paring down the gift registry, and placing an emphasis on accepting donations and giving food donations after the reception, to name a few. You can visit Changing the Present (www.changingthepresent.org/weddings), a Web site that allows the future bride and groom to fill out a registry and let friends and family know that they welcome gifts donated in their name. Another Web site, Portovert (www.portovert.com), was praised recently as the No. 1 green-wedding site by Martha Stewart Weddings. It offers a wedding guide that lists green and sustainable vendors for your wedding-planning needs.

VEHICLES: Most readers surveyed shared that large or luxury cars were the most wasteful item they could identify. Equally as dumb was buying these vehicles brand-new. While not everyone advocated small used cars as a solution, most mentioned how often large cars were driven by one person without fellow passengers. That seems judgmental, but

it's still enormously wasteful.

BAD HABITS: From sodas and junk food to alcohol and cigarettes, stop the madness! These items are expensive and bad for your health. One reader, Danielle in New Jersey, says: "I don't drink, so I don't understand why anyone would pay \$4.50-plus per drink when they go out. Expensive habit!"

CASINOS: Gambling hard-earned money is foolish. The odds are against you. Even if you only occasionally buy a lottery ticket or go to a casino once a year, you could be saving that money. It adds up quickly.

TICKETS: Being a good driver saves you a lot of money. Pay attention, and drive safely. Fines cost hundreds of dollars, and they're avoidable.

Sara Noel is owner of Frugal Village (www.frugalvillage.com), a Web site that offers practical, money-saving strategies. To send tips, comments or questions, write to Sara Noel, c/o United Media, 200 Madison Ave., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10016, or sara@frugalvillage.com.

Decision time: What to do with that old analog television set

By RANDY A. SALAS and JOHN EWOLDT
Star Tribune
(Minneapolis)

It's time to make up your mind about that old TV set. It might have served you well over the years,

but its analog tuner and over-the-air antenna will make it obsolete on June 12, when the federally mandated transition to all-digital TV broadcasts occurs — unless you do something about it.

You can keep using the old analog set by adding a

converter box (www.dtv2009.gov) and keeping your over-the-air antenna, or you can connect a cable or satellite service to it.

But if you choose to replace it with a new digital TV, what can you do with the old set? You can't

just throw it away, because some models contain up to 8 pounds of lead.

Recycling is an obvious choice. Here are some others:

Repurpose it. Just because that old analog set won't receive digital TV

See TV, Page 11

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Earth Day Contest winners:

Congratulations to our Earth Day Contest winners:

- **Daniel Fuller** of Ashtabula, who won an assortment of garden plants from J&H Greenhouse in Conneaut;
- **Corrine Wheeler** of Conneaut and **Doris Adams** of Conneaut, who each won an assortment of garden seeds from Kray's Co. in North Kingsville.

May Planting Contest:

This month we are back with an even bigger contest. And, because we believe in recycling, we're re-entering all those who sent an entry coupon into last month's contest. If you want to enter again, feel free to do so, but your entry must be received by May 20, when we will hold the drawing for these great prizes:

- \$10 of vegetable seeds from Austinburg Mill;
- A flat of vegetable plants, your choice, mix and match, courtesy of From the Ground Up in Geneva;
- A \$25 gift certificate from Girard's Nurseries;
- Two yards of top soil (you haul) from Brobst Tree and Stump Service. We will award two winners one yard each;
- Ten assorted seed packets from Saybrook Feed and Garden.

Mail your entries to FRUGAL GREEN / Carl Feather, Star Beacon, PO Box 2100, Ashtabula, Ohio 44005-2100. If you want to do multiple entries, please put them in one envelope so you don't waste the postage or envelopes. Remember, it's all about being FRUGAL and GREEN. You can also drop off entries in the Frugal Green jar on the Star Beacon circulation counter at 4626 Park Ave., Ashtabula.

MAY PLANTING GARDEN CONTEST

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What topics would you like to see in future issues of Frugal Green?

Other comments. We listen!

Mail coupon to FRUGAL GREEN / Carl Feather, Star Beacon Editorial Dept., PO Box 2100, Ashtabula, OH 44005-2100, or drop it off at 4626 Park Ave., Ashtabula (circulation department). Drawing is May 20, 2009. Prizes must be claimed at the merchant, and winner is responsible for any cost of delivery/transportation.

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By **CARL E. FEATHER**

Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA TOWNSHIP — Paul Thompson knows what it's like to be sick and not have medical insurance.

A nurse practitioner who lives in Denmark Township, Thompson grew up on a dairy farm in Orwell. His parents didn't have medical insurance and every illness brought a major decision between caring for the family member and putting personal finances in jeopardy.

"You need to go to the doctor, but you can't afford to, so you hope you get better," says Thompson.

If this sounds like your situation, or if Thompson sounds like the kind of empathetic practitioner you'd like to have taking care of your routine medical needs, make a note of this phone number: 997-5988. That will connect you to the appointment desk for the convenient

clinic at State Road Occupational Medical Facility, 600 State Road, where Thompson works part time.

The primary care clinic was added to the occupational medicine practice at the facility late last year. The clinic offers self-pay medical care in a bare-bones setting, but with high-quality medical staff. Dr. Keith Davis is medical director and provides services on Tuesday mornings; Thompson provides care the other three days of the week when the clinic is open for primary care appointments — Monday, Tuesday and Friday.

An office call is \$40. If you need additional diagnostic lab tests, the clinic will collect the sample and send it to the lab. They charge what the lab bills them, not what the patient would normally pay if billed by the lab.

Why didn't somebody come up this before now?

"It is a need that's been in the county here for



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

PAUL THOMPSON is a nurse practitioner who offers medical care for a flat rate to the uninsured and under-insured.

many years," says Thompson. "Nobody has tackled it, that's why I'm doing it. It's something that's needed."

The clinic is able to offer substantial savings by not accepting any insurances and thereby keeping administrative overhead low. All services must be paid for upon delivery, and by cash or credit card. In addition to treating routine family medical needs like

sprains, sore throats, ear infections, allergies, mono and skin rashes, the office offers pregnancy tests, flu shots, TB shots, children's vaccines (children 5 and older, only) and annual physical exams.

If a prescription is required, Thompson will write it with your financial constraints in mind.

"We try to work off those formularies that Wal-Mart and Kmart have that

offer the \$4 prescriptions," he says. "It doesn't make much sense if the patient comes to see us at the office and then can't afford the medicine."

Ron McVoy, who owns the State Road Medical building, said he and Lois L. Miller of Occupational Safety Solutions wanted to expand the clinic to meet this unserved need. At least 14,000 residents are uninsured, and many more have insurance with high deductibles and co-pays.

For them, it makes more sense to pay \$40 at a clinic than to wait a week to get an appointment and pay at least that much for a co-pay, plus face a huge bill for diagnostic tests ordered through the hospital.

Indeed, Lois Miller says

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Apples

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full production. In the interim, you will invest a substantial amount of money and work in nurturing your trees and protecting them from deer, insects and diseases.

Still interested in being a backyard orchardist? Read on:

The tree:

Fruit trees aren't started from seed – a scion from a known fruit-producing variety is grafted onto a rootstock that has been matched to the conditions in which it will be grown. Unless you're planting a commercial orchard, you probably won't be able to select the kind of rootstock variety, however. Brock, therefore, recommends buying your trees from a reputable nursery rather than from a box store. He's particularly fond of Stark Brothers.

Choose trees of varieties that are disease resistant but also appealing to your taste.

Apples need a polinator. If you have a flowering crab apple tree in your yard, you may be able to get away with just one apple tree. Most nurseries will provide information on good polinators for the tree you select. Don't ignore this important consideration.

"I learned after I'd bought 100 trees, I did not buy a polinator," Brock says.

Planting:

Brock prefers early spring for planting new trees. If you purchase from a mail-order nursery, they will ship the tree at the proper planting time.

Follow the planting directions that come with the tree. Don't skimp on the size of the hole; the roots need plenty of room. Identify the area of the graft and make sure you plant the tree so the graft is above the soil line.

If you live in the southern part of Ashtabula County, it's essential you make sure the tree roots will be properly drained. Brock uses a post-hole digger to go down a couple of feet below where the tree roots will rest. He fills that part of the hole with gravel to ensure good drainage, puts a layer of weed guard across the gravel, then plants the tree on top of that.

"If you don't get rid of the water, you will get mildew," Brock says.

If you are planting in the sandy soil of northern Ashtabula County, your concern is going to be keeping the tree properly watered in times of drought.

You want to plant the tree in the warmest spot in your yard. Place several thermometers across the yard to see which one registers the warmest temperature in the early morning, or watch the yard after an overnight frost and see which area does not have frost or where the frost melts first. That's where you want to plant your orchard.

Consider spreading milky spore at four spots away from the tree. The natural product will kill the larvae of Japanese beetles, says Brock.

Fertilizing:

Brock recommends purchasing the "Supreme" variety of fruit trees, which come with time-release fertilizer tablets to get the tree off to a good start.

Even more important than fertilizer is the need to provide your tree with sweet soil. That means you'll want to get a soil test and add lime as indicated. Most soil in Ashtabula County is acidic and needs lime.

Brock says the best time to fertilize your apple trees is Christmas. This gets nitrogen in the root zone early and available to the tree when it sets fruit in the spring. He recommends a 12-12-12 fertilizer, supplemented with urea for the additional nitrogen requirement. Scatter the fertilizer around the drip line of the tree, away from the trunk.

Peaches, cherries, plums and other small fruits should not be fertilized in the early winter. Refer to the instructions that come with your tree.

Pruning:

All fruit trees require pruning to produce a bountiful harvest. If you aren't willing to invest the time in learning how to properly prune and then do the work every year, don't bother buying a tree. Get your apples at one of the area's orchards.

There are Web sites that can show you how to prune your fruit trees, as well as books at the library and programs by area Master Gardeners.

Each type of fruit tree has a different pruning need for optimum production. You'll need to invest in a good pair of clippers and learn to identify buds and limb types. As to the best time of the year to prune, Brock says a well-respected grower once said there are only 52 days a year you should not prune, all of them Sundays.

That said, reserve major cuts to the tree when it is

dormant.

If you purchase your tree from a well-known mail-order nursery like Stark Brothers, they will include a planting and pruning guide with the tree. Or look for pruning videos on YouTube.

In general, Brock says when pruning dwarf apple trees you want to encourage the growth of spurs, not limbs. Apples develop on the spurs.

"You don't want to make a shade tree," Brock says. "Too many people make a shade tree from their fruit tree."

Another basic guideline for shaping your tree is to imagine it fitting into a square.

"I want all my fruit easy at hand, I don't want it too high," Brock says. "You can make a tree any size you want."

Your tree should grow by 18 to 22 inches per year.

"If it's growing 30 inches or more, it's being over fertilized," Brock said.

Make sure you prune branches to allow sunlight to reach the fruit. You don't want a leafy canopy on your tree; that will keep the sunlight from reaching your fruit.

Finally, when pruning multiple trees at once, disinfect your clippers with bleach between trees so you won't spread disease.

Spraying:

Spraying is like pruning: If you aren't prepared to adhere to a program of spraying, let someone else grow your fruit. Even the most dedicated organic gardeners find that growing fruit without the benefit of dormant spray and others to control infestation by insects, mildew and bacteria is an exercise in

See APPLES, Page 11

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Compost

Continued from 3

you don't put a lid on your bin.

"In field trials, they showed the open-top compost bin was best, but that's not what people want," he says.

McIntyre's company also imports from an Ontario firm a smaller, square bin called the Soil Saver. It's ideal for homeowners who don't have a great deal of yard waste to compost but want to turn their household refuse into rich soil.

Either unit is going to cost you about \$100 if you order online, but McIntyre is offering Frugal Green readers the option of buying them direct from his garage and saving the shipping costs plus receiving a generous discount. More about that later.

Indeed, if you are handy, you really don't have to buy a compost bin. McIntyre says three wood pal-

lets, the kind with open slats, can be stood on end and wired or screwed together in an "U" shape to form an open-end bin. If you have an old garbage can with the bottom falling out of it, you got yourself a compost bin. The key is to have drainage from the bottom and, ideally, some holes on the side to allow air flow.

If you poke around on the Internet, you can find lots of sites that offer plans for compost bins, including the popular tumbler units that cost \$200 or more.

So why drop money on something that makes dirt? Don't your kids and dog already do enough of that?

Yes, but this is dirt you can use.

"What you go to the store and pay \$10 for, you can get for free," says McIntyre, who uses his compost for planting flowers and enriching the soil in his gardens. "Also, you don't have to pay to have it hauled away."

Indeed, it was his stint as a commercial organic farmer that got McIntyre interested in compost, which is to organic farmers what chemical fertilizer is to the big farm operations. McIntyre used to make the stuff by the ton using horse manure from the fairgrounds.

"We grew the vegetables and found out there was more money making compost bins than in picking green beans," he says.

"But if I could afford to be a gentleman farmer, I'd

prefer to do that."

Composting is also good for the environment - nature is going to decompose a lot of that stuff that's going in your trash bags. You might as well get some value out of it and save the landfill space for something less useful, like your mutual fund statements.

So what can go into that compost bin? Just about everything from your kitchen, except meat and dairy, which will attract animals to the bin. All your yard clippings, including weeds as long as they don't have mature seeds, will make great compost.

This is not a process for the impatient, however. You are going to be making compost for next spring. The good news is you don't have to put a lot of work into it. Every week or so you need to aerate the compost. And you need to monitor the compost's progress, based upon what kind of system you choose.

For example, you can use a special kind of red worm to eat your garbage and turn it into dirt. If you go that route you'll have to buy a pound of the worms from a mail order place like Uncle Jim's Worm Farm, and you'll need to ensure a proper temperature range and light conditions for the worms to thrive in. They like it dark and they like it relatively cool.

Most people start composting on the cheap, however, relying upon bacteria to do the job at no cost. Your job is to create a nurturing environment — moisture, food and warmth — ideally 160 degrees at the center. If you are really passionate about compost, you may want to invest in a ther-

Composting resources

■ Covered Bridge compost bins: cboinc.com

■ Compost resource page, a great resource for beginners to experts: howtocompost.org

■ The Ashtabula County Solid Waste District Office in the old Ashtabula County courthouse has books and videos that can be borrowed. Contact them at 576-3777.

■ Composting with worms: www.unclejimswormfarm.com

mometer made for that purpose, but they are expensive.

Keeping the right balance of food and moisture in the pile can help generate heat. Basically, you want three parts of carbon for every one part of nitrogen.

Nitrogen will come from green material — fresh grass clippings, manures (rabbit, chicken, but not from cats, dogs or humans), trimmings from produce and weeds. Brown material provides carbon and includes straw, dried leaves, small amounts of wood chips/sawdust, shredded newspaper (not gloss paper), cardboard and brown paper.

The finer you can chop up the material, the faster you'll get compost from it.

Build the pile in layers, alternating green and brown material. Hose down the layers and keep it moist — the material should have the moisture content of a damp sponge.

Every four to seven days, turn the material in the pile to add air and feed the microorganisms. You can purchase a tool made just for this purpose, but a garden pitchfork is just as

effective and has lots of other uses around your garden.

If the temperature in the pile is not high enough, add green material. If it's too hot, or the pile smells of ammonia, add more brown material.

Your compost will be ready for use when the material no longer warms up within a few days of turning it. You can use a screen to sift the compost; return the larger material that does not fall through to the compost pile.

There is a huge amount of information on the Internet about starting a compost pile and fine tuning it. McIntyre suggests checking out the composting videos on You Tube for those who learn best by watching.

If you're ready to jump in with a commercially made bin, McIntyre is offering his Wishing Well bin to Frugal Green readers for \$55 when picked up at his garage at 300 North Spruce St., Jefferson (right off Route 167 east). He's also offering the Soil Saver model for \$65.

Call 576-5515 to make sure he'll be home when you want to pick up your

Tea for you

Compost tea is nutrient-rich organic fertilizer you can make from compost.

Add a shovelful of fine compost to a five gallon bucket of water; allow it to steep for a few days.

Use this tea to fertilize everything from your garden plants to your lawn. If applying to young plants, dilute it.



Surplus

Continued from 5

but we decided we weren't ready for that," said Dick Thomas.

Whether it is a bag of coffee or can of soup, the owners check their prices against those in the grocery stores to make sure their stickers are way under retail. For example, a box of Rice-A-Roni is just 59 cents, a can of Campbell's Select soup 95 cents and Chunky soup 85 cents. Hunt's spaghetti sauces are just 85 cents for those 26.5-ounce cans. A 12-ounce bag of whole-bean organic coffee by Celestial Seasonings in tempting gourmet flavors is just \$5.99.

The store quietly opened April Fool's Day, but there's nothing foolish about shopping at surplus grocery stores. Hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. There's a chance you'll even find them open on Sunday afternoons.

Apples

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futility.

You need to know who your fruit trees' enemies are. Bookmark www.ohio-line.osu.edu and consult it frequently for information on growing fruit trees, dealing with pests and improving production. If you can't find the information online, pick up the phone and call the local extension office or take a sample of your pest/damage to the office for identification.

At a minimum, you will do six preventive applications of spray every year:

1. Dormant oil in the late winter/early spring, before 1/4-inch of green appears on the buds. The oil helps suffocate maggot flies that can cause brown streaks in your apples.

2. Prior to blossom, spray with Imiden and Patan to prevent infestation by the curcullo insect. Bonide is a good choice for home orchards. Adding a product like Spray Aide will

make the spray stick to the tree longer.

IMPORTANT: Never spray when the tree is in full blossom, you run the risk of killing the bees.

3. When the bloom is about 70 percent fallen, spray again with a fungicide/insecticide combination.

4. In June fungus is going to be a major concern. Spray the trees with a fungicide product, but also keep an eye out for aphids and mites that may require insecticide to control them.

5. The last week of July or first week of August, spray the trees with a weak solution of calcium chloride, the common deicer (not road salt). Brock adds a handful to several gallons of water. He says the calcium helps "green up" the leaves of the tree and improves the taste of the fruit.

6. Your final application of spray will be a dormant spray after the fruit has been harvested, although you may need to bring other sprays into play in the interim if problems

arise.

Bottom line: You must pay attention to your trees, watch for disease/insect infestation and react.

Thinning:

Once fruit sets on the tree, you'll want to thin it to improve quality and size. Thinning, like pruning back a third of the new growth every year, can seem wasteful, but your trees need this attention. Additionally, if you don't thin certain apple varieties, the tree will yield a crop only every-other-year.

As you can see, growing apples, or any kind of fruit for that matter, takes a great deal of money and work before you take the first bite. But Brock says the difference is in the taste. And you may discover that a lot of your cares and stress will melt away as you dote on your trees and coax the next harvest of sweet, juicy apples from their branches.

Online: Stark Brothers Nursersies: www.stark-bros.com

Clinic

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one of the worst parts of going to the doctor is facing that bill at the end – a great unknown in most practices. But the cost of every service provided, including lab tests, is posted in the clinic's waiting room so there's no danger of heart attack when the bill is presented.

Speaking of heart attack, that's one of the things Thompson won't treat at the clinic. Pain management is another. As a nurse practitioner he can address about 85 percent of the issues that routinely come up in family practice. If a case requires referral to a specialist, he'll help set that up while the patient is still in the office. As he points out, even if you do need to see a specialist, visiting the clinic first is most likely going to save you several hundred dollars over making the emergency room your first stop.

TV

Continued from 6

signals anymore doesn't mean it has stopped working. Put it in a rec room and use it for video games or karaoke.

Watch movies. Hook up a DVD player or VCR and use it in a spare room for the kids or guests to watch prerecorded movies and TV shows. Or haul it to the cabin for the same purpose.

Donate it. A few charities and thrift stores might accept working televisions. Call the United Way for

charities in your area that accept older TVs. Then call the charity to confirm before you drop it off.

Hack it. Hacked Gadgets (www.hackedgadgets.com) offers instructions on how to turn your old set into a

plasma globe, a Tesla coil and three other gadgets suitable for a mad scientist's lab. Or Wacky Archives shows you step-by-step how to turn your vintage console into an aquarium (www.wack-yarchives.com). Enter "old

TV" in the search box at either site to find the write-ups.

Give it away. Maybe a friend, neighbor or relative can use it for one of the above purposes. Or list it for free on Freecycle (www.freecycle.org) or the free section at

Craigslist (www.craigslist.org).

Sell it. Don't expect to get much. There's a glut of old TV sets being sold on Craigslist. But anything is better than what you have now — an old analog TV set that needs some attention before June 12.

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