



March 2009

Frugal Green

Plan your Economic Victory Garden

***Start your plants
from seed and save!***

Page 4

***Enter our contest and
win a free garden***

Page 7

plus tips to help you save money, live green

Save
money



Save
the planet



Cover Story:

Fresh vegetables can be expensive in the grocery store, but if you have a little land and ambition, you can grow your own. Stories start on page 3.

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City man willing to help you start garden— Page 5
Community garden helps citizens grow their own — Page 6

Win a garden!

Enter our contest to win garden plants and/ or seeds to help you start a garden this spring.
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FRUGAL GREEN

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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.

Margie evicts nasty chemicals from house

You know, it just seemed like a good idea at the time. Maybe the best stories start out with the "good idea at the time" sentence. This is not one of those stories.

My oven was terribly dirty. I mean, the health department would have shut us down had an inspector come through the kitchen. It was time to take action.

With a can of Easy-Off oven cleaner in one hand and a sponge in the other, I tackled the job like a professional. First I sprayed and sprayed the Easy-Off in the cavernous mouth of the oven, trying to cover every inch of the charred blobs of sauce crusted on the bottom.



Margie
Trax-Page

green margie

The fumes from the chemicals were horrible; I felt like someone snatched the air right out of my lungs. Hacking and coughing, Moe the beagle and I evacuated the kitchen. I don't need a vet bill for

doggy Easy-Off lung.

The next morning, armed with a bucket of hot water and a sponge, I started to scrub. The greasy buildup washed off like a dream! Still hacking and coughing, I wiped the caustic chemicals away, along with the charred bits of this and that.

The oven was clean as a whistle.

Then I noticed the range hood. The underside of the cream-colored hood was greasy and gross. How long had I cooked under such a dirty thing? Yuck.

I tried degreaser and dishwashing liquid. I scrubbed until my arms hurt and my sponge fell apart. Nothing worked.

Then I noticed the Easy-Off oven cleaner that had worked so well on the oven. I sprayed and hacked and coughed and let the chemicals sit on the hood for about 20 minutes.

When I went back to clean it off, well, I got a real surprise. All the grease came off, but so did all the paint! That's right, my range hood is now clean right down to the shiny metal base.

Not good.

I decided to make some macaroni and cheese for dinner. The chemical smell that came from the oven wasn't appetizing. How could I put little Emily's mac and cheese in a chemically altered oven? No way.

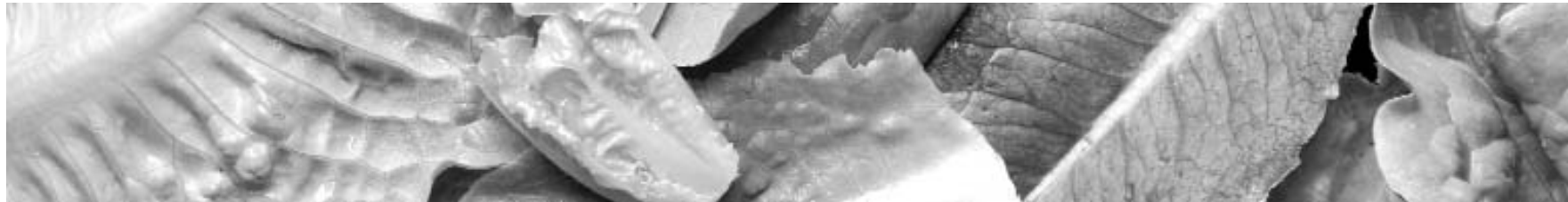
The whole oven cleaning and range hood stripping event got me thinking:

1. I need a new range hood.
2. It really did seem like a good idea at the time.
3. I don't want my daughter around so many chemicals, especially in the kitchen.

It is time to go green with my household cleaning.

"No," Brian said. "No, no, no. I am not making our own laundry detergent. I like the smell of Lysol. Go outside and hug a tree, but the house has to be clean and you clean a house with cleansers!" he said.

See MARGIE, Page 10



Plant an Economic Victory Garden this spring

Take control of your food budget by growing your own vegetables

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer

JEFFERSON – In the war against the greatest recession since the Great Depression, the Victory Garden is making a strong comeback.

Americans were encouraged to plant Victory Gardens during both the first and second World Wars as a way of ensuring there would be plenty of vegetables available for troops. In 1943 Americans planted more than 20 million of these gardens and the resulting harvest accounted for nearly one-third of all vegetables consumed in the nation.

Facing an economic enemy, the Victory Garden is an idea whose time has once again come.

“I’m hearing from people haven’t had a garden in 10 years talking about planting one this year,” says David Marrison, Ashtabula County OSU extension agent.

The back-to-the-land trend was further proven at a recent backyard poultry clinic held in the county. That event, which usually draws 50 or so, had quadruple the number in attendance.

This interest in raising food is understandable – so many of the expenses in our budgets are fixed, food is the one area where we have wiggle room and can do it ourselves. And if you’re blessed with access to an acre or more, the potential is there to raise sufficient vegetables to sell, share with family or freeze/can to help

See Victory, Page 9



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

JOANNE SEAVEY of J&H Greenhouse in Conneaut examines a flat of plants she’s started for the coming gardening season. Seavey is expecting strong interest in vegetable gardening this year because of the recession. Want to learn how to grow your own plants from seed? See story on page 4.

Save money, grow your plants from seed: Here's what you need to know to get started

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer

CONNEAUT — There's still time to grow your own vegetable plants from seed for this year's garden.

In fact, JoAnne Seavey of J&H Greenhouse (her husband Howard is the "H" in the business), 589 Middle Road, says most home gardeners make the mistake of starting plants from seed way too early. The result is plants that are too "spindly."

As to when is the correct time to start your plants depends upon when you plan to transplant them to your garden and what you're growing. For example, cabbage and broccoli prefer a cool growing climate and can be planted when the soil is 50 degrees or warmer. On the other hand, plants like tomatoes and peppers require a warmer soil, 65 to 70 degrees, before they'll

start growing — usually after Memorial Day for most of the county.

Since your seedlings will need to grow indoors for six to eight weeks before transplanting, between now and the 15th of April is a good time to start them.

Bottom line: You need to do your research. Even an experienced grower like Seavey, who started her greenhouse back in 1994, keeps a journal of when she starts each seed variety. And she reads the seed packets and information sheets to make sure her timing is right for each variety.

"Every seed is different," Seavey says. "If you don't pay attention, you can waste a lot of money."

Seavey, who both sells vegetable plants from her greenhouse and grows for the Conneaut Farmer's Market, says you also have

to research the varieties of vegetables to make sure they are a good match for our climate and your specific soil type. She knows from experience that the popular "California Wonder" pepper does not grow well here, but Lady Bell is an excellent match. Rutgers, Roma and the beef variety of tomatoes are likewise good matches.

Of course, what you grow will also be dictated by your use for the vegetable. Some tomato varieties are best for slicing and sandwiches; others are superior for canning and making sauces. Your got to do your research.

Once you decide what is you want to grow, purchase a potting mix formulated just for starting plants from seeds. For Seavey, whose whole business hangs of the success of germinating seeds and growing healthy young plants, her choice is Pro-Mix, a sterile product that includes a fungicide (it's sold at Kray & Co. in North Kingsville). She can't risk the chance of a fungus damping off the young plants, and neither should you.

Whatever you do, says Seavey, do not use off-the-shelf potting soil. Seavey



CHERRY TOMATO plants are easy to grow from seed.

says it's too heavy for the roots of those little seedlings. Indeed, she fluffs up or aerates the mix before placing it in the pans in which she starts the seeds.

Home gardeners may want to purchase peat pots for small seed-starting projects, but frugal gardeners know there are plenty of household items that can be recycled for the task.

"My dad used to use egg cartons, but you got to make sure you have the drainage," Seavey says. Bottom line, poke plenty of holes in the bottom of whatever container you use. The container should be wide enough to accommodate and encourage root growth — consider recycling your yogurt and small margarine tubs, or cut the tops off plastic

water bottles.

When using a recycled container, sanitize it with a 10-percent bleach water solution for 15 minutes to prevent introducing fungus and bacteria into the media. Rinse and air dry before using.

Follow the packet instructions for planting depth and watering. Seed-starting medium is very porous and will soak up water like a sponge.

Seedlings need warmth and moisture to germinate. You can place them near a heater to keep them warm or purchase a warming pad that goes under the tray. They'll also need grow lights or a room with even lighting. Seavey says putting them near a window is not a good solution, as she feels it makes for spindly plants, although most Web sites suggest using a window with a south exposure.

"They got to have full sun," Howard adds.

Providing good air circulation is important to avoid damping off. A small fan running on low and directed toward the surface should do the trick. Keep the soil moist by misting the plants with a spray

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City man making world a better place one garden at a time

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA – Nik Tressler says he gave up on sweeping visions for a better world long ago. These days, the Adult Basic Education instructor is content to change his community 100 square feet at a time.

Tressler feels backyard gardens are a simple, green way to transform urban landscapes while drawing neighbors closer.

“One of the biggest problems in society today is we are cutting ourselves off from each other, civic life is disappearing”, he says.

He sees the back-yard vegetable garden as an antidote for that trend. When people have a patch of vegetables in their back yard, even a small city lot, it forces them outside.

When neighbors have gardens, it provides a common talking point. And when the gardens produce more vegetables than one family can use, it opens the opportunity to share.

There are benefits to the individual, as well, like healthy eating, lower food costs, exercise and relaxation. Working in a garden can help you forget about AIG bonuses, the national debt and high unemployment. There’s great satisfaction in cooking and eating a meal that you grew.

Tressler has had a little garden in his back yard since 1977, when he bought his first house.

“I’ve been gardening for years,” Tressler says. “My mother raised us in the garden and I absolutely hated it as a kid.”

Tressler says vegetable gardening is a habit with



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

NIK TRESSLER is willing to rototill gardens so people can grow their own food. Tressler’s grandson Mason, 3, seems to be up for the job, as well.

him, but he’s not obsessive about having the perfect garden. If it grows, it grows. The important thing is the process.

He uses a rototiller to prepare his 300-square-foot garden for planting in May. He would like to see that tiller used more often, and to that end, Tressler offers help to the first-time urban vegetable gardener by tilling a 100 square-foot-plot (that’s 10-by-10 feet) with his tiller.

“I have a rototiller I use once or twice a year for my own purposes. Since I own the sucker, I figure let’s use it,” Tressler says.

His service is free, but is limited to the amount of time he has outside of

work and other commitments. “It’s on a first-come, first-serve basis,” he says.

Tressler won’t rake off the garden after he breaks up the sod, and he won’t plant the garden for you. But he will save you the back-breaking work of spading up a new plot.

“There are a lot of people who have experience in gardening but no way to till the ground,” says Tressler. He hopes his offer will help them get back into gardening and transform the Ashtabula landscape one backyard garden at a time.

To schedule an appointment, call Tressler at 998-2374 and leave a message.

Seeds

Continued from 4

bottle or watering them from the bottom up by placing the tray or container in a shallow pan.

JoAnne Seavey compares growing plants from seed to raising puppies; they require a lot of attention daily. And speaking of animals, if you have a cat in your home, you’ll need to make sure the flats of seedlings are away from the kitty. One misplaced landing could destroy your future garden.

As it gets closer to the time you’ll be transplanting the plants to your garden, you’ll need to gradually harden them or acclimate them to direct sunlight and fluctuating temperatures. Start by placing them in direct sunlight in the mornings over a period of several days. Then start to

move them outdoors a hour or two each day, gradually increasing the time until they are strong enough for the big move.

Seavey says most vegetable plants are best planted around Memorial Day or thereafter. Gardeners may think they are getting a jump start on production by planting earlier, but it just doesn’t work that way in our climate and you run the risk of losing the plant.

If that happens, or if your seedlings damp off or suffer other disasters, there’s always the local greenhouse. At the very least, attempting to grow your garden plants will seed will give you an appreciation of just how hard greenhouse owners like Seavey must work to produce strong, healthy plants.

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ALICIA MCFARLAND

THE COMMUNITY Garden on Lake Avenue provided vegetables for nearly two dozen families last year.

Want to garden, but don't have the land?

Community garden helps Ashtabula residents grow their own veggies

By CARL E. FEATHER
Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA —

Ashtabula residents who don't have the land on which to garden can still save money on their food bill this summer by planting a plot in the Ashtabula City Community Garden.

Established last year, the garden offers up to 20 plots for citizens to use free of charge to grow vegetables and herbs. Alicia McFarland, economic development director for the Ashtabula Port Authority, started the project last year with the assistance of Ron Kister, who owns the land at Lake Avenue and West 13th Street. Thomas Fence provided split-rail fencing for the lot and Ohio American Water installed a water pump.

The plots are offered on a first-come, first-serve

basis. As of late last week, five plots were still available.

Volunteers tiller the land in preparation for the initial planting in mid-May. Participants must agree to a list of guidelines and rules before being assigned to a plot.

McFarland said the project was established to create a "pocket of charm" that would "spruce up the community" and create a positive statement to visitors. But it has evolved into much more. McFarland feels the sour economy will make the community garden more of an economic necessity this year. And it opens up opportunities for socializing, exercise and building community.

"It was like a community-gathering place," she says. "People who would drive by stopped and came in and talked. It was a com-

munity builder, that's for sure."

McFarland, who maintained a garden there last year, said several of the plots were planted by elementary school children, but the focus this year is to get families and individuals into the garden. About 50 percent of those who had a garden in there last year have already signed up for 2009.

Christine and Lee Spring had a 10-by-13 plot in the garden last year and raised vegetables for themselves and three children.

"My kids like fresh vegetables," said Christine. "They got to see it go from seed to plant to plants producing something."

Spring said they have land on which to raise a garden, but it is of poor quality. And being part of a community garden was a way for the Springs to meet

Community garden project takes root at Madison church

MADISON — Digging Deeper is the name for a new community garden project at Cornerstone Friends Church, 2300 Hubbard Road. Garden plots measuring 20 by 25 feet are available to Madison-area residents. Classes are offered by Lake County Master Gardener volunteers.

The next class, "Where, What and When of Vegetable Gardening," is 7 p.m. Saturday.

There is no fee for any part of this project. For information or to register, call (440) 428-6868 or send e-mail to joni-dietz@cfmadison.org.

others with similar interests.

A satisfied customer, she and Lee have reserved their plot for this year.

"I am very thankful for the Community Garden because I would not have had fresh vegetables every day if it had not been for that," she says.

To find out more about the garden, call McFarland at 992-7154 or the Ashtabula City Manager's Office.

"We have enough room," McFarland said when asked if the garden could grow in response to increased demand. "We can expand the garden right where it is now. We'll do whatever we can to accommodate people who would like to garden."

"I see nothing but positives from it," McFarland said. "Excuse the pun, but it's going to do nothing continue to grow."

Enter our contest, win free seeds, plants from Frugal Green advertisers

To help celebrate Earth Day 2009, our advertisers are offering several lucky Frugal Green readers the opportunity to plant a garden this spring with a giveaway of plants/ seeds.

The first prize is a package of vegetable plants from J&H Greenhouse in Conneaut. This package includes:

- 4 tomato plants in 4-inch pots
- 4 pepper plants
- 1 zucchini plant
- 1 yellow squash plant
- 1 cucumber plant
- 2 additional plants of your choice.

The winner also will receive \$10 in seed from Kray & Co. in North Kingsville. The credit can be applied toward the purchase of any bulk seed from the store.

Second prize is a certificate for \$10 in seed from Kray & Co.

To enter:

Fill out the coupon and mail it to the Star Beacon/ Frugal Green Contest, Attn: Carl Feather, P.O. Box 2100, Ashtabula, OH 44005-2100. Or drop it off at 4626 Park Ave., Ashtabula. ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY APRIL 20. A random drawing will be held Earth Day, April 22. Winners will be notified by phone.

EARTH DAY GARDEN CONTEST

Name: _____

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

Other Comments:

Mail it to the Star Beacon/Frugal Green Contest, Attn: Carl Feather, P.O. Box 2100, Ashtabula, OH 44005-2100. Or drop it off at 4626 Park Ave., Ashtabula. A random drawing will be held Earth Day, April 22.

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Tax law changes could save you money this year

U.S. Rep. Steven C. LaTourette (R-Bainbridge Township) says taxpayers and small-business owners should be aware of several changes in tax law this year, including tweaks brought about by the signing of legislation earlier this year.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has compiled a one-stop-shopping Web site that outlines the most important changes. The site is www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=204335,00.html?portlet=6.

“As with any year, there are tax changes that you should know about, but this year is a bit more interesting because some additional changes were signed into law that might impact you,” LaTourette said. “I would encourage folks to visit the IRS Web site to get the most updated information.”

A few of the highlights are:

■ **Making Work Pay Tax Credit.** For 2009 and 2010, the bill provides a refundable tax credit of up to \$400 for working individuals and \$800 for working families. This tax credit is calculated at a rate of 6.2 percent of earned income, and phases out for taxpayers with adjusted gross income in excess of \$75,000 (\$150,000 for married couples filing jointly). You can receive this benefit through a reduction in the amount of income tax withheld from your paycheck or by claiming the credit on your tax returns.

■ **\$250 for Social Security recipients, veterans and railroad retirees.** The Economic Recovery Payment will be paid by the Social Security Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Railroad Retirement Board. More than \$14 billion is set aside for one-time \$250 payments to Social Security recipients, those on Supplemental Income (SSI) and veterans receiving disability and pensions. The money should arrive within 120 days of the bill’s signing, Feb. 17.

■ **Money back for new vehicle purchases.** Taxpayers who purchase certain vehicles in 2009 can deduct the state and local sales taxes they pay. The new law provides all taxpayers with a deduction for state and local sales taxes and excise taxes paid on the purchase of new cars, light trucks, recreational vehicles and motorcycles through 2009. This deduction is subject to a phase-out for taxpayers with adjusted gross income in excess of \$125,000 (\$250,000 in the case of a joint return).

■ **Increase eligibility for the refundable portion of child care.** The bill increases eligibility for the refundable child tax credit in 2009 and 2010. For 2008, the child tax credit is refundable to the extent of 15 percent of the taxpayer’s earned income in excess of \$8,500. The bill reduces this floor to just \$3,000 for 2009 and 2010.

Starting a garden? Don’t forget the soil test

By **CARL E. FEATHER**
Staff Writer

JEFFERSON — One of the best ways to get your new garden off to a great start is by analyzing the soil to measure its fertility and pH.

You can purchase do-it-yourself soil test kits/ meters, but for an investment of only \$10.50, a university analytical lab will analyze the soil and provide you with a three-year plan for correcting deficiencies and optimizing the dirt to crops you want to grow in it.

“I would say the soil test is the most important thing you can do because our soils tend to be on the low side of 6 (on the pH scale),” says David Marrison, extension agent with the OSU Extension Office in Jefferson.

A good pH number for a vegetable garden is 6.5 to 7, slightly alkaline. Marrison says that will usually require adding some lime to your soil. Being off by as little as 0.5 pH can make a big difference the success of growing plants that are particularly sensitive to soil conditions. For that reason, he does not recommend the do-it-yourself kits that may have a significant error factor.

If you grow different kinds of crops in your home garden — for example, fruit and berries on one section, vegetables on another and flowers in a third — you should have the soil tested for each growing area. Blueberries are notorious for loving an acidic soil, but that same acidic soil will discourage the growth of many

vegetables.

The soil test measures more than the alkaline/ acidic condition of the soil, however. It also provides the status of phosphorous, potassium, calcium, magnesium, cation, exchange capacity, lime requirement index and base saturation.

Marrison says a soil test should be done every three years. Spring and fall are the preferred times of the year for testing.

Soil test kits are available from both the OSU Extension Office and Soil and Water Conservation District Office, both located at 39 Wall St., Jefferson.

According to an Ohio State University fact sheet, garden sites should be sampled at a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Provide a composite sample rather than from just one location. A good representative sample will contain 10 to 15 cores or slices taken at the same depth and volume. A random, zigzag pattern is suggested.

Mix the samples in a clean plastic bucket and then follow the soil testing lab’s instructions as to the quantity to submit.

You’ll get the results of your test back in about two weeks; as a courtesy, when you get your test kit through the Extension Office, the results will be forwarded to Marrison, as well, so if you have questions or need help in planning a soil remediation plan, Marrison has the information he needs to answer your questions.

“Now is a good time to do (the soil test),” Marrison says. “It takes a couple of weeks to get it back when spring comes, you’re ready.”

Victory

Continued from page 3

lower your food bill year-around.

But Marrison warns it's a good idea to start small, especially if this is your first attempt at gardening. It's much better to grow a small plot of vegetables well than to plant a huge garden that fails because you don't have time to tend it come July.

A 10 by 10-foot garden is more than enough for the average-sized family," Marrison says.

Where to plant

It's important your garden be in a sunny spot (at least six hours of sun a day) and the soil be worked up and loose. Soil also needs to be well-drained, which can be an issue for much of Ashtabula County, says Marrison.

"The main obstacle is drainage," he says of our silt-and-loam soils. "If it's a wet year, gardening is rough."

The northern part of the county, much of which is ancient beaches, has sandy soil. Although better from a water perspective, sandy soil does not hold nutrients as well. And droughts can be particularly brutal to gardens planted in sandy soil. If this sounds like your land, locate your garden so it will be close to a source of water.

Regardless which type of soil you have, you should be adding compost, or organic matter, to it every year. Start your own compost pile with lawn clippings, kitchen waste, and shredded leaves this spring, and you'll never have to buy a bag of the stuff.

If you don't have access to a rototiller that can break up a new garden location, the raised bed approach is probably going to be your best bet. You can build a raised bed using lumber, railroad ties or simply by mounding up dirt. Raised beds provide better drainage and the soil in it warms faster, which can give you a few extra days of growing and food production.

"Raised beds, especially in this county, are wonderful," Marrison says. "Seventy percent of the time, we have wet years. The raised bed gets you away from that wet, heavy soil."

Want to learn more about raised beds? Attend the Master Gardeners class May 16 in Rome Township. Cost is \$7 per person. Call 576-9008 for information.

If you go with a raised bed, you will still have to dig up the sod under it, then add topsoil mixed with organic material like peat moss, compost and perhaps Vermiculite if the soil is heavy.

Another advantage of the raised bed is that you can create a "high tunnel" over it using hoops and plastic sheets. This can be used to warm the soil even faster

and grow some cold-loving crops like lettuce almost year-around.

When to plant

First and foremost, plant something you and your family will eat. If you are a novice, resist the temptation to grow exotic vegetables, such as popcorn and certain kinds of squash. Focus on the basics.

Marrison says vegetables like tomatoes, sweet peppers, carrots, leaf lettuce, peas, cucumbers, green/yellow beans, potatoes, onions and radishes are easy to grow. Cruciferous vegetables, such as cabbage and broccoli, can be more challenging and require more pest control than what most first-year gardeners will want to devote.

While everyone enjoys fresh sweet corn, it's a demanding vegetable that requires soil rich in nitrogen. It will pull a great deal of nutrients from the soil, as well. Marrison says you're probably better off buying it from a local grower.

Remember your plants will grow many times their original size, so don't squeeze them. Five or six tomato plants ought to be plenty for a family with a 10-by-10-foot plot. Six pepper plants would likewise be sufficient.

If space is limited, be

wary of vegetables with long, invading vines, such as cucumbers and most kinds of squash. And avoid pumpkins unless you can dedicate a patch just to them.

Research vegetable varieties to determine if their soil and water needs are a good fit for your climate and ground. Poke around the Web sites of seed companies to become familiar with the myriad varieties that are out there. Have an idea of the plant varieties you want before going to the nursery to purchase them.

Don't get overly anxious to plant your garden or purchase the plants. Look for plants that have been hardened off, that is accustomed to the cool nights and full sun.

Be prepared for invaders. Rabbits will find your bean sprouts a most tasty treat and can wipe out a garden overnight. Ground hogs like to sample tomatoes; a raccoon will decimate a sweet corn patch in one visit. Your dog, running freely in the soft soil, can do a lot of harm to the young plants in one pass. Chances are, you'll find fencing to be essential investment for long-term success.

Growing

A whole host of problems will present themselves as your garden

moves from June to harvest. Fortunately, you don't have to go it alone.

The Master's Gardeners Program offers call-in assistance at the Extension Office from 9 a.m. to noon Mondays and 1 to 4 p.m. Thursdays starting May 4. The number is 576-9008.

"Any gardener can just call the hotline and speak to a Master Gardener," Marrison says. "From that little worm on the tomato plant to how to start seeds."

If you have access to the Internet, the Ohio State University Extension Web site has a searchable database of fact sheets and bulletins on virtually any gardening topic. The address is ohioline.osu.edu.

Next year

Marrison says the first year of gardening is relatively easy; it's the second and third years that present challenges as soil becomes depleted and pests discover the location of their favorite foods.

Thus, it's a good idea to practice crop rotation, whether you have a large garden or just a small raised bed. Take picture of your garden or draw a map of it so you can refer back to it next spring, and make sure you change the location of your vegetables.

"Year two is when you get into rotational problems," Marrison says.

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Disposable wipes gunk up treatment plant

By MARGIE TRAX PAGE
Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

Geneva wastewater superintendent Gary Hydinger has seen just about anything you can flush down a toilet.

In fact, Geneva's wastewater treatment plant is equipped with pumps that can pass a 3-inch ball, just in case a toddler decides to play, "flush the toy."

"Nothing really prepared me for the problems disposable towelettes could cause to the wastewater treatment plant," Hydinger said. "But boy, can they cause trouble."

Hydinger said a \$4,000 pump at the wastewater lift station burned out because of the inappropriate use of disposable cleaning towelettes.

"People need to realize that those cloths are disposable but not flushable," he said. "All those disposable cloths jammed it up and burned it out."

Disposable towelettes and wipes are available for almost every application from wiping baby's bottom to antibacterial hand wipes.

Household cleaners have joined the bandwagon with disposable dusting cloths, floor cleaning cloths,

bleach-soaked wipes for cleaning, wipes for window washing, and car dashboard cleaning.

Now makeup-removal wipes, facial cleaning wipes, fingernail polish removing wipes and more are on store shelves.

New numbers aren't available, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimated 83,000 tons of wipes were used in 2005, making disposable wipes a multi-billion dollar niche in the cleaning and personal care industries.

Hydinger said people read the word "disposable" and their minds think "flushable."

There are a lot of things you can flush down the toilet that you really shouldn't flush down the toilet," he said.

"Sometimes I think people don't realize the infrastructure under their houses and streets. They don't think of what happens to something after it is flushed or dumped in a storm sewer. They don't think of the consequences to the system."

Hydinger said the city will replace the pump with a larger piece of equipment to help prevent future issues.

"But people need to stop flushing disposable tow-

Homemade flushable wipes

2-¼ cups water
2 tbsp baby shampoo
1 tbsp baby oil
1 roll paper towels, cut in half
Cut the roll of paper towels in half. Mix the ingredients adding the baby shampoo last. Store in a plastic container.

els," he said.

In other words, think before you flush. The treatment system you save may be your own.

"If the product doesn't dissolve as fast as toilet paper, it is just not flushable," he said.

Margie

Continued from 2

I have to admit, the urge to go into anti-microbial germ warfare in my bathroom and kitchen is strong. I don't want germs in my house. I want to be a good mother, the kind of mother like the mom in

the Clorox commercials who singlehandedly wipes away millions of harmful, yucky germs with one bleach-infused disposable cloth.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports that the use of antibacterial cleaners like the ones under my kitchen sink don't do anything

more than plain old vinegar, water and baking soda.

In fact, the FDA reports that the use and overuse of these cleaners and hand soaps add to the risk of breeding "super germs," which are bacteria that survive the chemical onslaught and become resistant to antibacterial cleaners.

I also have to remember that the vision of creepy-crawly germs on my countertop was crafted by Clorox marketing teams, the same people who want me to buy Clorox products.

So for the next month I will not use Lysol or Clorox or any other cleaner that I can replace with a

safer, more natural homemade product.

Let's get clean and green together, shall we? Share your green cleaning tips and cleanser "recipes" for publication in Frugal Green by calling (440) 998-2323 ext. 286 or e-mail mtrax@starbeacon.com.

House parties grow in popularity as recession deepens

By LINI S. KADABA

The Philadelphia Inquirer
PHILADELPHIA —

When De Ann Mensch was laid off last month for the second time in a little over a year, she did not polish her resume.

Instead, the ex-bank teller (and ex-mortgage loan closer) burnished her sterling silver jewelry and her sales pitch. Now the soft-spoken Mensch, 44, of Pennsburg, Pa., spends several hours a week at house parties where she hawks the earrings, necklaces and other jewelry

she loves to wear, earning about \$250 a pop in commissions.

"I need the income," said the mother of two, who has a son in college. "I don't have to worry about being fired or laid off; I don't have to worry about the company being downsized."

In a weak economy, that promise is solid gold. As layoffs mount and the nation's unemployment rate hovers at 8.1 percent, many of those down on their luck have joined jewelry company Silpada, cos-

metics maker Avon, or any number of other direct-sales companies to fill the income void.

The door-to-door pitch, or more often the house party, that peddles jewelry, cosmetics, pet items, health products, and such — known as direct sales — has consistently weathered economic storms, experts say.

"Whatever it is that makes someone feel better is a good candidate for that little splurge, and many direct-selling companies have products in that

range," said Amy M. Robinson, spokeswoman for the Direct Selling Association.

Perhaps an entire outfit or a fancy vacation is out of the question, but a \$4 lipstick can fit any budget, direct sellers say. Even a more expensive piece of jewelry can find takers who want a pick-me-up from the recessionary blues.

Silpada, for one, saw its sales force grow to 27,000 last year, up 13 percent over the previous year, and revenue jump 8 percent to

\$270 million — its best year ever, said Jerry Kelly, CEO and cofounder of the Kansas City, Mo., company.

Besides, the social aspect of parties — where consultants talk up products while friends of the hostess sample items and compare notes, often while sipping wine and munching appetizers — encourages participation. It even offers a relatively cheap girls' night out.

"If you agree to attend one of your friend's parties, then you buy," said

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Being frugal means saving money a little at a time

Frugal Living

by

SARA NOEL

Frugality often seems like a lot of effort for a few cents. But it's about making better choices that save larger amounts, too. Maybe you have a goal to pay down debt, such as your mortgage. One extra payment per year can shave a few years off your loan. But it's tough sometimes to get everyone in your family on board when they can't see the big picture. One way to get them to listen is to talk about the bigger ways to save money.

INSURANCE: Look to see whether you can raise your deductible to save. Consider shopping for new insurance and see whether you can find better rates, too. Have all of your insurance at one company to get a discount. Take a defensive-driving class to get a discount, too. When calling insurance companies, ask them about senior, student, professional organization or group,

multi-car, mileage and safety discounts. Try to pay yearly versus monthly, and have your bill auto-deducted instead of mailed. And while you're trying to save on your automobile costs, consider parking the gas guzzler and driving a smaller car, car-pooling, using public transportation, or walking or riding a bike more often.

DITCH CONVENIENCE: Packaged foods are costly. Chop your own vegetables, slice and grate your own cheese, make your own snacks, try a homemade pizza, cut back or cut out soft drinks, and pack your lunch. While you're at it, when shopping try some store-brand foods or buy in bulk. Start a garden. You can start from seed, buy smaller,

less expensive plants or bare-root perennials, share with family and friends, and shop seasonal garden sales. Speaking of ditching convenience, delay spending on items until they're on sale. For a handy reference calendar on the best time to buy items, visit my forums at www.frugalvillage.com/forums and search "Annual sales and seasonal discounts."

PRESCRIPTIONS: Shop for less expensive prescriptions. Check to see whether your local pharmacies have rewards for transferring or promotional rewards for keeping your prescription with them. Check to see whether mail-ordered prescriptions will save you money. If you don't have prescription coverage, contact Partnership for Prescription Assistance www.pparx.org, 888-4PPA-NOW (888-477-2669), to connect you with programs to help meet

your prescription needs. Visit Destination RX, www.drx.com, for price comparisons. Talk to your doctor, too. He or she might be able to offer prescription samples or coupons, tell you whether a generic option is effective and available or whether your prescription can be pill-splitting. Check drug manufacturer's Web sites for coupons or Internet drug coupons (www.internetdrugcoupons.com), but be sure to call your pharmacy to check if coupons are accepted and to verify prices.

BUNDLE AND NEGOTIATE: Pay for Internet access, phone and television from the same company to save money. Call them, and simply ask if they offer any discounts. Often times, you can get your premium channels at a discounted rate for a limited time. Call around and see which company is

offering the best deal and see whether your current provider will give you a discount for staying with them. If not, make the switch. You can also pare down to basic features to save, too. Many people are completely cutting out cable television or their landline telephones in favor of cell phones.

HOST A SWAP PARTY: Gather friends and family for a swap party to save on the cost of clothes, toys, household items, etc. Clean out the closets, and anything you don't swap, you can try to sell.

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

Parties

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Stephen Hoch, a marketing professor at the Wharton School. "You may not buy much, but you buy some."

An analysis of the period from 1987 to 2007 found that during recessionary times, direct selling in the United States (adjusted for inflation) grew 4.5 percent on average, Robinson said. During the same slow years, the gross domestic product took a baby step of less than 1 percent, and retail sales fell 3.3 percent.

While 2008 numbers are not due until midyear,

Robinson said anecdotal reports indicate the industry continues to prove "recession resistant. ... The party-plan jewelry companies seem to be doing particularly well, as are some of the smaller companies that are still in a high-growth stage."

Karen Pressley, 42, of

Bensalem, Pa., put all her energies into pushing Arbonne Swiss skin care products after she lost a part-time job this year as an intake coordinator for a psychology practice.

The other day, she touted face creams and cleansing regimens — crafting a pitch that shared her life

story (she recently had surgery for cancer). "I use the detox every 30 days to get rid of any free radicals in this body of mine," she

said.

Hoch said the key to success is the ability to build a broad-based network, pyramid style.

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