

Composting is honorable

Spring is in the air, the sun's getting stronger and I can't wait to sit in my back yard and marvel at the flowers in bloom and edibles thriving.

But wait — doesn't that mean it's also the season for a whole lot of work? Weeding, pruning, spraying, watering and hauling yard waste?

That's just not my style.

Instead, I've found that a beautiful yard can be yours without a lot of effort, if you just apply some of Mother Nature's gardening techniques, such as composting and less toxic pest control.

These common-sense practices leave you not only with more leisure time, but they're also healthier for your family and the environment. Using fewer synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and weed killers creates a safer yard for family and pets, and prevents harm to beneficial insects, birds and other wildlife.

Composting

Lets start from the ground up ... literally! Every good garden begins



with the soil, and one of the best soil amendments is compost. The best part: You can make compost yourself right in your backyard. How? By letting fruit and vegetable scraps from your kitchen, grass clippings, leaves and other yard waste break down naturally in a pile or special compost bin — you can build your own or buy one.

Composting is easy if you follow a few simple rules. For step-by-step instructions, visit www.compostguide.com or get live advice from a Monterey Bay Master Gardener.

Less toxic pest control

Keeping your garden free of harmful insects begins with the right choice of plants. As a rule, native plants are less susceptible to pests (and usually need less water, too).

You can also pair plants

that tend to "cooperate" so that one naturally wards off the other's pests. For example, rosemary deters moths, beetles and flies that feed on cabbage, beans, carrots and sage.

For local stores offering safer gardening products and expert advice, call the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority at 775-3000.

If you experience a sudden urge to get rid of all those leftover conventional gardening chemicals in your shed, you're on the right track to a low-toxic garden. Dispose of any unwanted chemicals safely at the SVSWA's household hazardous waste collection facilities. NEVER pour these types of chemicals down the sink, toilet or storm drains nor put them in the garbage.

Get inspired

Ready to join the League of Lazy Gardeners? (Don't get too excited; I don't think there's any such thing.)

For more inspiration throughout the summer, mark your calendar for the Smart Gardening Faire June 21 in Scotts Valley, as

RESOURCES

n MONTEREY BAY MASTER GARDENERS: 763-8007, <http://montereybaymastergardeners.org>.

n COMPOST BINS: Orchard Supply Hardware, Salinas, 422-9652. Last Chance Mercantile, Marina, 384-5313.

n BOKAY NURSERY: Salinas, 455-1868, <http://bokaynursery.com>

n HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION FACILITIES: 139 Sun St., Salinas, 424-5520. 31400 Johnson Canyon Road, Gonzales, 675-2143.

well as the countywide Master Gardener's Tour Aug. 9-10. Both are organized by the Monterey County Master Gardeners. The tour showcases eco-friendly gardens, and yours could be one of them. The application deadline is May 19.

ALAN STYLES is the Recycling Coordinator for the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority. His "Recycle News" column appears monthly in the Central Coast Living Section of the Salinas Californian. Contact him at alanst@svswa.org.