

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- This month's Eco-Office highlights some green tips for spring.
- Upcoming Sustainability Committee meetings in Lowell: 3/21, 4/18, 5/16
- March 20: First day of spring!
- April 24: Administrative Professionals Day

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## Rain Gardens By Theresa Portante-Lyle

Looking to spruce up your home or office landscaping this year? Looking for a way you can help reduce stormwater runoff, one of the major contributors to water pollution? Why not combine the two and consider building a rain garden. In recent years, rain gardens have increased in popularity as a sustainable landscaping technique since they combine the aesthetics of a garden with effective on-site management of stormwater. Impervious surfaces, such as a roof, sidewalks, driveways, and even compacted lawns, all contribute to the amount of stormwater runoff entering our storm drains, and in some cases, directly entering our waterbodies, such as lakes and rivers. Rain gardens are designed to collect water from these surfaces and enable on-site infiltration,

thus reducing the overall contribution to stormwater runoff. Rain gardens are built as shallow depressions that allow the water to collect and pool, usually for several hours, before slowly filtering in to the ground. A rain garden should be placed at least 10 feet from the foundation and on a down slope from any building. Runoff can be channeled using piping or swales. A great place to start looking for a runoff source is at the downspouts of your house or office building. There are many online resources to help you start designing your garden. Check out information from [the New England](#)

[Wild Flower Society](#), [the University of Rhode Island Sustainable Landscaping program](#), and [the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Sustainable Landscapes and Turf program](#). Rain gardens have also been constructed to manage runoff in urban areas. Check out an example of a community rain garden project that was funded by [The New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program](#).



Photo credit: Future City, Inc.

## Is concentrated better? By Jennifer Donnell



The product looks the same, but is it? The chemical industry continues to improve upon the quality and selection of prod-

ucts for sanitation, cleaning and laundry needs. If you have a new high efficiency wash machine, you'll love this product; small enough to hold and pour with one hand. Thinking about doing some cleaning? Caution advised. According to the material safety data sheets, the concentration of sodium hypochlorite is higher. The regular Clorox bleach has a concentration of 5-10% and the new concentrated is at 7-15% sodium hypochlorite. This could

mean a product double in strength. Clorox Concentrated comes with new guidelines for measuring the dosage for a variety of needs, disinfecting, laundry, and sanitizing. This is important and time should be taken to read these directions. Less is better in some cases; the bottle is small and easy to handle and weighs less, however extra caution and awareness is needed with handling and using this product.

## Eating Local By Susy King

While it's still a bit early for much to grow in this part of the country, before long we will be seeing the first of the Northeast's crops hitting the market. Some of the earliest foods to expect are asparagus, spinach, and rhubarb. Looking for ideas for how to cook these things? Below is a recipe to enjoy this year's rhubarb.

### Susy's Rhubarb Compote

6 cups rhubarb, cut into ½ inch slices  
 ¾ cup granulated sugar  
 ½ tsp cinnamon  
 ⅛ tsp nutmeg  
 ½ tsp vanilla

Combine rhubarb, sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg in large saucepan. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat and then reduce to low heat. Simmer until rhubarb starts to break down. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Enjoy!

Suggested uses: topping for ice cream, yogurt, or pound cake; filling for mini pies; eat it with a spoon!



## Rain Collection By Jennifer Donnell

Summer is right around the corner. What will it be this spring; microbursts, frequent thunderstorms and days of rain? Or perhaps this will be a dry year, no one really knows. I check in every Thursday with the [US Drought Monitor](#) just for reassurance.

Some dry areas are already showing up here in New England. With my *Early Girl* tomato seeds in mind, I'll play it safe. Our house could use some good rain barrels under the gutters. By



collecting rainwater off the roof, I'll have a head start on water supplies, benefit our city's storm water treatment efforts, and perhaps have some leftover for our thirsty lawn. It's also possible we might save some money on our water bill, and if our city feels the need to promote water conservation, we'll already be there! Many cities and Public Water Systems offer discounts on rain barrels, such as [the Portland Water District in Maine](#). Garden centers carry them as well as hardware stores. It is easy to make your own, and the **selection** and **price** keep

getting better. For our old Victorian house, we are hoping for a style that matches. I think the [Savannah Rain Saver](#) (available at Sam's Club) with pink petunias planted on top will be great!



# De-clutter Your Workspace By Heather Radcliffe

With spring just around the corner, today's a great day to clean up your work space. Here are a few tips to guide you:

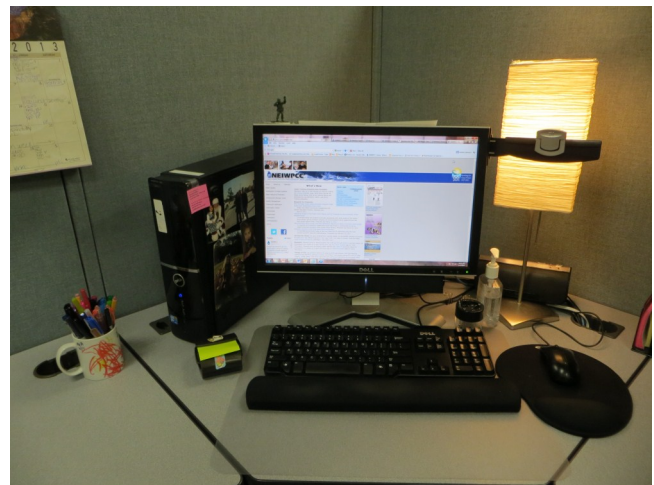
- Start with the physical clutter on your desk. Clear the top of your desk so it only holds the essentials—I promise you don't need 500 post-its—and your current project. File away extra paperwork that you don't need today. Overloaded with paper? Think about if you really need it, and

recycle what you can. Did you inherit documents from the nineties? You don't need them. A good bet is that anything older than 5 years can probably be recycled. Anything 10 years or older can definitely be recycled.

- Sort through your catch-all drawer. Overindulge on office supplies? Return them to storage for everyone to use so we don't have to keep buying more pens, tape, staples, paper clips, and post-it notes. Let's use up what

we already have.

- Organize your digital clutter and make use of your virtual recycle bin. Is your email inbox at its limit? Delete! Do you have a slew of documents saved all over the place? Create new folders to group documents together by project and/or year. Use the paper rule to also delete files older than 10 years—and probably those older than 5 years too.
- Clean your keyboard, mouse, and phone. Trust me, they are gross.



## WaterSense By Nick Cohen

Conserving water is easier than ever thanks to EPA's WaterSense Program. The program provides certification for and information about water efficiency measures. WaterSense is geared towards a wide variety of partners, including builders, irrigation users, manufacturers and retailers of water appliances, water distributors, and water users including homeowners. WaterSense's "Fix a Leak Week" is coming up March 18-24. There are also numerous educational opportunities about water efficiency and irrigation coming up this spring. For more information, check out [EPA's WaterSense Webpage](#). As a promotional partner of the WaterSense Program, NEIWPC also has a [webpage](#) linking to this EPA information.



## Homemade Drain Cleaner By Lindsey Walaski

This recipe is a more sustainable approach to unclogging household drains. Commercial products can corrode pipes after excessive use and can be dangerous to the user when applied improperly. The benefits of a homemade drain cleaner include eliminating exposure to harsh chemicals and utilizing a more cost effective solution with local ingredients. You may not even need to leave your home!

### Ingredients:

½ cup of Baking Soda

1 cup of Vinegar

1 gallon of boiling water

### Steps:

- 1) Pour the baking soda down the drain, allowing the baking soda to build up around the drain.
- 2) Pour ½ cup of vinegar on the baking soda, causing the mixture to bubble.
- 3) When the bubbling begins to subside, pour the remaining ½ cup of vinegar on the mixture.
- 4) Allow the mixture to sit for 15 minutes, and then flush with the gallon of boiling water.

Some users had bad experiences when using a commercial drain cleaner immediately after using this homemade drain cleaner when the results weren't instant. It's recommended to just repeat this process two or three times for stubborn clogs. Enjoy and stay green!



Step 1



Step 2

## Submit an article for our June summer issue!

NEIWPC staff at the Lowell office started putting together the Eco-Office Bulletin newsletter in September 2012 as a way for the sustainability committee to update the rest of the office on their activities, as well as to share news and tips on sustainable practices at the office and home. Distribution was expanded to include all NEIWPC employees in December 2012, and we are pleased that with this March 2013 issue, articles have come from staff in both Lowell and beyond. For future issues, we welcome article submissions from all employees. Please contact Heather Radcliffe if you are interested in contributing.

### Introducing our New Sustainability Committee Chairwoman



## From the Chair: B.Y.O. Bottle! By Emily Bird

As a University of Vermont (UVM) alumnus and previous campus coordinator of [UVM Eco-Reps](#) with the [UVM Office of Sustainability \(OoS\)](#) – I wanted to showcase UVM’s recent sustainability victory as the largest public institution to say “[Bye-bye, Bottled Water.](#)” The Ban is the result of a student-led effort spearheaded through Vermont Student Environmental Program (VTSTEP) in cooperation with the UVM OoS. Thanks to UVM’s environmentally-oriented campus culture, bottled water was never a top-seller on campus, and it was already old-habit for most students to bring their own bottle and utilize the campus’ widespread water refill stations. When the Sodexo University Dining Services ten-year [beverage] contract with Coca-Cola of Northern New England came to a close – it was the opportune time for campus to cut bottled water out of its beverage coolers altogether.

I spoke with Gioia Thompson, director of the UVM OoS and her intern/UVM Eco-Rep, Stephanie Haynes to see how the Ban is going on campus. Gioia expressed that the student-body and campus staff have been very supportive of the Ban, so supportive that there is really no need to discuss “*what happened,*” but to discuss the follow-up items that make this a truly sustainable initiative, environmentally *and* programmatically.

Along with the Ban comes the continuation of a campus sustainability educational effort and cooperation among various entities on campus. UVM Eco-Reps promote campus sustainability to the student-body utilizing community based social marketing methods. In fact, UVM Eco-Reps facilitate a bottled water v. tap water taste test overcoming the barrier that bottled water tastes “better” than tap water. In addition, a UVM social-marketing course is focusing work on educating first-year students who are new to UVM on the Ban promoting the “Drink Local” message. Another concern was that students would turn to “sugary” beverages without the bottled water option – Gioia says this is a non-issue, as relatively little bottled water was sold before, and students are comfortable drinking tap water. As follow-up on this concern, an honors student is tracking the offering of beverages on campus. OoS is now working with UVM Conference and Event Services to order water stations for events, providing compostable cups as a back-up option for those who do not carry their own bottle.

Gioia stresses this effort as a “water education project” connecting the community, both on *and* off campus, to the importance of protecting water quality for their drinking water source: Lake Champlain. The OoS has utilized [Burlington’s water quality report](#) and drinking water quality tests done on campus to address concerns that tap water quality is poor and old pipes may leach copper or lead. The result of water quality tests addressed these concerns, confirming that tap water at UVM and in Vermont is clean and healthy, free of charge!



## E-Recycling By Clair Ryan

Smart phones, laptops, plasma TV's, GPS navigators, portable blu-ray players, digital this, touchscreen that; these are the electronics that make modern life so convenient. There's little question that America loves its gadgets, and consumers replace outdated products at an astonishing rate. An EPA estimate found that in one year, households in the U.S. disposed of 304 million electronic items, equaling about 2 million tons of waste. Landfilling electronics is problematic because the devices often contain heavy metals that can contaminate soil and groundwater. Moreover, landfilling electronics is wasteful when many of the components can be harvested and repurposed in new devices. Of NEI-WPCC's member states, all but MA and NH have recently passed laws mandating that all household electronics be recycled. Where can you take your old gear? Best

Buy has a comprehensive take back program – you can take almost any item to any store – but be aware of their three item per day limit. A company called MRM ([mrmrecycling.com](http://mrmrecycling.com)) has partnered with several manufacturers to provide additional drop-off sites in many communities. Check out their website to find sites in your area. It's also worth looking at your local solid waste management/recycling center's

webpage. While few municipalities accept electronics curbside, many accommodate drop off. Finally, many of the top manufacturers (Dell, Sony, Sharp, LG, etc.) will accept same-brand recyclables by mail. When shopping for electronics, try to keep multi-functionality, durability and longevity in mind, and when disposing of older models, always recycle!



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Established by an Act of Congress in 1947, the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission is a not-for-profit interstate agency that employs a variety of strategies to meet the water-related needs of our member states—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. We serve and assist our states by:

- Coordinating forums and events that encourage cooperation among the states
- Developing resources that foster progress on water and wastewater issues
- Representing the region in matters of federal policy
- Training environmental professionals
- Initiating and overseeing scientific research
- Educating the public
- Providing overall leadership in water management and protection