

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- This month's Eco-Office highlights some green tips for fall.
- Upcoming Sustainability Committee meetings in Lowell: 9/18, 10/16, 11/20, 12/18
- September 23: First day of fall!
- November 2: Clocks go back! Daylight Savings Time ends.

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Natural Solutions to Things That Bug You By Evelyn Powers

As the warm, sunny days of summer transition to crisp days of fall, we are not the only ones that may be spending more time indoors. Around this time of year, mice begin trying to find warm, cozy places to live and nest for the coming winter. Don't let your home be one of them. With a little preparation and vigilance, you can live pest-free without resorting to traps and poisons.

Eliminate points of entry. This is easier said than done, especially in older homes. Mice can fit through a hole as small as 1/4". Plug crevices and gaps around radiator pipes as well under bathroom and kitchen sinks with steel wool, especially where you see droppings or signs of mice activity. Seal larger holes in walls, ceilings and floors with joint compound, plaster or wood filler. Make sure doors and windows close tightly. These measures may

also help save energy and reduce your winter heating costs.

Organize and remove clutter. Mice make nests out of shredded fibrous material. Dispose of garbage in a covered trash receptacle. Do not leave pet food out. Once opened, store pet food, grains, pasta and cereal in airtight containers.

Use natural deterrents. Your pantry, not pesticides, may be your best ally in pest defense. The smell of peppermint repels not only mice, but also ants, flies and other insects. Soak cotton balls with peppermint oil (sold in natural food stores) and place in closets, under sinks, under sofas, behind radiators and anywhere else you see



Photo credit: www.cartoonstock.com

signs of mice. Place potted peppermint plants on window sills, use mint in cooking and use natural peppermint-scented cleaning products. This has the added benefit of making your house smell like Christmas, year-round.

If you don't have (or want) a cat, fake it. Borrow used cat litter from a friend or family member who have feline friends and place it in small open containers around your basement, closets, anywhere the smell won't get to you. Replace

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Neon Is Rad, But Is It Green? By Anna Meyer



Photo credit: Flickr Creative Commons (Carineo6)

The popularity of day-glo apparel this summer inspired me to investigate whether glowing clothes are eco-friendly. Unfortunately, the basic answer is no.

Manufacturers make fluorescent fabrics by treating fibers with chemicals called optical brighteners. Most optical brighteners are not biodegradable, and some have been shown to be detrimental to aquatic life. The brighteners are intended to stay in the fabric, but they can

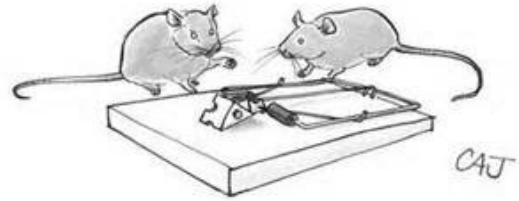
get into municipal wastewater via laundry, and municipal treatment facilities are not equipped to remove them.

Patagonia, a clothing company known for being environmentally responsible, simply doesn't use optical brighteners. Brands that do use them can minimize potential environmental impacts by choosing brighteners approved by the Global Organic Textile Standard and by thoroughly treating wastewater from the manufacturing process.

regularly. Weird, yes, but this really works! (and thank you, Lola and Koda!) Besides, the peppermint oil will mask the smell.

Finally, don't let moths destroy those winter woolens! If you have cedar closets or trunks, give them a light sanding now

and again in the spring to refresh the aroma. Make your own sachets of moth-repelling potpourri using bay leaves, lavender, eucalyptus, cinnamon sticks and dried lemon peels wrapped in cheesecloth. Place in closets and dresser drawers, crush periodically to refresh.



As if we don't get enough to eat under their sofa cushions!
Photo credit: www.cartoonstock.com

Fall Lawn Care to Save Soil By Clair Ryan

Most people would guess that Spring is the best season for seeding new grass and repairing thin parts of the lawn. After all, Spring is when the lawn



Photo credit: Clair Ryan

The thin turf in the picture on the top is prone to soil erosion – you can see soil that has come off the lawn onto the road, where it will be washed into a storm drain the next time it rains. The picture on the bottom shows much healthier turf with no clear signs of erosion.

wakes up from its long winter dormancy and begins growing again, and it's when most other plants sprout too.

However, contrary to popular wisdom, the early Fall is the best time to seed new grass. Why is this? The cool temperatures and frequent rain of September and October help new grass grow, and generally by November, the new turf will have enough energy stored in its roots to withstand the winter and come back in the Spring. Grass seeded in the Spring is typically not strong enough to withstand summer drought or extreme heat. And did you know that repairing thin or bald patches of lawn protects water quality? Thin and patchy lawns are prone to increase soil erosion, which moves sediment and nutrients off the lawn and eventually into storm drains and water bodies (see photos to the left).

Lawn managers should consider ordering a soil test from their local university extension service before seeding. Test results

showing soil low in phosphorus or organic matter or with a lot of acidity indicate that soil should be amended prior to seeding. Compost or manure can do the trick for increasing phosphorus levels and organic content, while pulverized limestone can reduce acidity. Although we usually advise against using phosphorus on established lawns, seedlings need a bit more of this nutrient to establish a strong root system.

Finally, explore growing different kinds of plants in lawn areas that are consistently thin or patchy due to shade, poor drainage, steep slopes, or other site factors. Many native plants are much more adept at growing in shade and excessive moisture than grass.

For more information about planting a rain garden in wet spots of the yard, check out the University of Connecticut's handy guide for homeowners: <http://nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/>

Local Flavors By Susy King

Cranberries and apples are two fruits that grow locally in New England and make great autumn desserts. I tried this delicious recipe for the first time last fall and look forward to making it again this year!

Cranberry Apple Crumb Bars *(adapted from the Smitten Kitchen Cookbook)*

Crumb Crust and Topping:

2 sticks unsalted butter, chilled and cut into 16 chunks
 3 cups all-purpose flour
 1 cup granulated sugar
 ½ tsp salt
 1 tsp baking powder
 ½ tsp cinnamon
 ¼ tsp nutmeg
 1/8 tsp cloves
 1/8 tsp allspice
 1 egg

Filling:

½ tsp grated orange zest
 1 ½ tbs freshly squeezed orange juice
 1 ¾ cups fresh cranberries
 1/3 cup granulated sugar
 1 tbs cornstarch
 3 apples, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line the bottom of a 9x13 pan with parchment paper, and butter the parchment. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, and spices. With a pastry blender or fork, work the butter and egg into the flour mixture until it resembles a



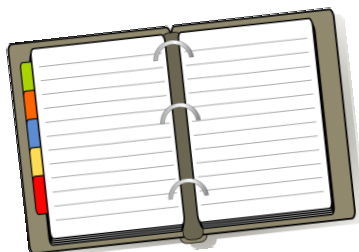
Photo credit: www.recipegirl.com

coarse meal. Pat half of the crumb mixture into the bottom of the pan. Reserve the other half.

In the bowl of a food processor, briefly pulse the orange zest and juice, cranberries, sugar, and cornstarch until the berries are coarsely chopped, but not pureed (alternatively you can chop the cranberries with a knife and then mix in the other ingredients). Mix the sliced apples with the berry mixture. Spread the filling over the crumb base. Sprinkle the reserved crumbs evenly over the filling.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until lightly brown on top. Cool completely before cutting into squares. Enjoy!

Style It Sustainable By Kristen Fitzpatrick

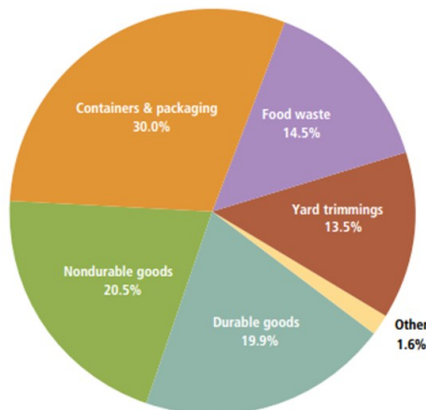


As the New England fall approaches and our thoughts are increasingly consumed by drier days and cooler nights, crisp fall foliage, and pumpkins as far as the eye can see, it is also that time of the year for one more thing – reordering your personal calendar. While it's not something that we often think about, I was recently introduced to a few companies striving to provide a quality product that both serves its purpose and remains eco-friendly. Whether it's a desk top calendar or a booklet appointment planner, companies such as [House of Doolittle](#), [At-A-Glance](#), and [Ecosystem](#) are offering products made from 30 percent – 100 percent Post-Consumer Recycled Paper. You'll find a wide variety of styles that cater to many preferences, so whether you want tropical fish swimming on your desk calendar or a planner that lays out your day by the hour, these companies deliver!

From the Chair: Why Is Recycling Progress Stalled? By Dan Peckham

Recycling isn't a new concept – in fact, we've been tracking [waste generation](#) and [our recycling rate](#) since 1960. Back then, only 6.4 percent of solid waste generated in the United States was recycled. We've made a lot of progress since then – now, 50 years later, about 35 percent of municipal solid waste is recycled and per capita waste generation is finally starting to decline. However, our recycling rate has barely been improving in the past five years. What's going wrong? Can we blame those making the products for using materials that can't be recycled, or is it an issue with our habits as consumers?

Figure 8. Total MSW Generation (by product category), 2012
251 Million Tons (before recycling)



From EPA's [2012 Municipal Solid Waste \(MSW\) Generation, Recycling, and Disposal Report](#)

First, some highlights from EPA's report linked above:

- Over 50 percent of what we recycle is paper and paperboard – the reuse of the 44 million tons of recovered paper in 2012 avoided the emissions equivalent to taking 27 million cars off the road for the year. However, we're still only recycling 65 percent

of the paper and paperboard generated.

- Lead-Acid Batteries are recycled 95 percent of the time. Nothing else even hits 70 percent.
- For other materials, we're not doing as well. For metals, 34 percent of weight generated is recovered. For plastics, just 9 percent is recovered!

The bottom line is that a lot of material still ends up in trash bins, on the streets, or in our rivers and oceans instead of the recycling bin. It's hard to know, however, how much of the material generated even has the potential to be recycled: for example, after meticulously scanning all outside surfaces of a given plastic container, we are often forced conclude that the item in question just isn't recyclable. Some of our nation's leaders believe that the public needs to be more aware of this before they make a purchase. Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) recently [proposed a bill](#) to create an optional standardized recycling label (far more prominently placed than the current symbol system) that producers could put on their products/packaging – the idea being that people would opt for easily-recyclable products when given the choice.

Tackling the same issue from a bottom-up perspective, OpenIdeo has [announced winners](#) of a recent challenge they hosted – the contest involved proposing solutions to address the question "How might we establish better recycling habits at home?" The win-



ning solutions, ranging from [recycling apps](#) that let you compete against friends to trading a [bottle for a smile](#), reflect the site's grass-roots, crowdsourcing approach to changing behavior.

To answer the question we started with, it appears that both producers and consumers could change the way they act to help improve recycling rates. Both of these solutions connect back to the key point, though: [engaging people – both by educating and rewarding them – spurs changes in habits](#). As these and other initiatives gain support, we may see recycling rates swing up past 40 (or dare I say 50) percent. And at that point, we're halfway there.



Photo credit: www.multivu.com



Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce

Two-thirds of produce samples in recent government tests had pesticide residues.

For consumers that would like to limit their dietary exposure to potentially harmful chemicals, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) created the [Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce](#). This guide highlights the cleanest and dirtiest conventionally-raised fruits and vegetables. If a conventionally grown food you want tests high for

pesticides (produce on the dirty dozen list), then you can consider opting for the organic version instead.

You can read the EWG report and browse the full clean fifteen and dirty dozen lists on their [website](#). You can also print out a double-sided wallet-sized card of the lists (pictured on the right) and bring it with you to the grocery store to help you shop smarter. If you would like a printer-friendly version of these lists, please email [Dan Peckham](#).



Submit an article for our December winter 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 recent articles have come from staff in both Lowell and beyond. For future issues, we welcome article submissions from all employees. Please contact [Dan Peckham](#) if you are interested in contributing.

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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