



Patricia Dines

Compassionate & Empowering Community Educator
Freelance Writer, Trainer, & Public Speaker
Specializing in Environmental Topics

WRITING PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Ask EcoGirl (Syndicated eco-advice column • Author • 2007 – present)



“EcoGirl believes that everyone can be a superhero for the planet. Then she shows you how!” Past columns include: *Can I Afford to Go Solar?* • *Taming Our Tiny Ant Friends* • *Seeing Through Green Eyes: Remodeling Green on the Cheap* • *Holiday Donations: Your Magic Wand for Planetary Change!* • *Creating a Healthy Garden from the Start* • *Batteries Need Recycling Too*

“Your Ask EcoGirl columns are fun and informative, and I really LOVE the resources you list at the bottom. Having this makes ‘doing’ feel like it can be a reality, not just a nice idea.”
Jill Engvaldsen, A Regular Reader

“Thank you so much for your contributions to our newspaper. People are clearly reading your column and you’re such a delight to work with. You meet deadlines and your work is well-done and thoughtful. I like your writing style, thorough and upbeat, and encouraging people to actually do things. I love what you’re doing!”

Vesta Copestakes, Editor, West County Gazette

“Solar financing is a complex topic and you nailed it.”
Chris Cone, Writer, Coordinator Green Energy Loan Program

The Next STEP (City of Sebastopol bi-monthly newsletter • Editor, Lead Writer, & Graphic Artist • 2001 – present)



The Next STEP newsletter offers useful information and gently encourages readers to reduce their use of synthetic pesticides and other toxics. Article topics have included: *Perfume Dreams* • *Healthy Homes for the Holidays* • *Protecting Children From Pesticides* • *Natural Cleaners Go Mainstream (and What’s Hiding Inside?)* • *Green Air Fresheners* • *Preventing Those Neurotoxic Blues* • *Mosquito Protection Without Toxics* • *Safer Chemicals Policy Proposed to California Legislature* • *The Laguna’s Lushness*

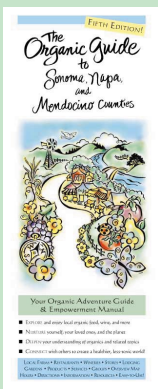
“I love the [Next STEP] newsletter! It’s given me so many ideas and is so friendly not preachy.”

“[The articles] are not only practically helpful but also very inspiring.”

“Thank you, this is fabulous info to have on hand.”

(Representative reader comments from annual anonymous survey cards.)

The Organic Guides (Guidebooks for the San Francisco Bay Area • Author & Graphic Artist • Seven editions, 1997 – 2007)



Subtitled “Your Organic Travel Guide and Empowerment Manual,” each book starts with short, easy-to-read articles that educate and inspire. Then they make action easy by presenting a cornucopia of new places to discover and support (many uncovered through extensive primary research). Article topics have included: *What is organic, exactly?* • *The true costs of pesticides* • *The economic value of ecosystems* • *Wise spending on organic* • *The benefits of buying small and local* • *Bringing organic into our daily lives* • *Digging the dirt with community gardens* • *Reconnecting to community and the cycle of life*

“I honestly believe that The Organic Guide should be required reading for any institution of higher learning teaching classes on agricultural sustainability and food systems. Check it out for yourself.”

James Johnson, The Quantum Agriculture Project

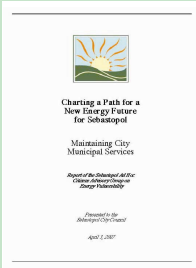
“[A] cornucopia of organic delights.... If a visit to northern California’s wine country is in your travel plans, be sure to pick up a copy.... A wealth of healthful information you’re not likely to find in Fodor’s.”

Delicious Living magazine

Also recommended by: *Bon Appetit, Bay Area Backroads, Earth Island Journal, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Press Democrat, The North Bay Bohemian, Marin County’s Pacific Sun* – & organic fans everywhere!



Charting a Path for a New Energy Future for Sebastopol (Report of the City of Sebastopol Citizens Advisory Group on Energy Vulnerability (CAGE) • Executive Editor & Project Coordinator • 2007) •••••



After spending many months exploring a range of facts, theories, and ideas about the likely upcoming energy supply challenges, CAGE produced this summary analysis and recommended actions for Sebastopol's City Council.

Response from Sebastopol City Council

"This is an incredible document. I really appreciate you for all doing the hard work to make this happen, to bring this forward."

Councilmember Craig Litwin

"I want to thank the [Advisory Group] and the wealth of editorial and writing skills of Patricia Dines. We were very lucky to have you, to be able to put this through, in this format and this detail."

Councilmember Linda Kelley

"I encourage the Council and members of the public to read this document very carefully, because I think it has some very important information for us and some very valuable recommendations."

Councilmember Larry Robinson

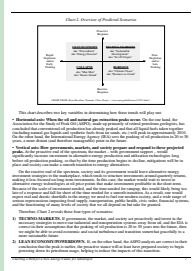
"An excellent read, fascinating."

Mayor Sam Pierce

Response by Others

"The CAGE report is quite an amazing piece of work and certainly a model for other communities who will want to follow in your footsteps. Our group, Transition Town Asheville, cited the report and some of its conclusions in a panel presentation we made to the larger community last month. So your work is helping inform us out here in the east."

Joan Engelhardt, Transition Town Asheville, North Carolina



Better Not Bigger: Grappling With Growth in Sonoma County (Conference & Community Event • Conference Steering Committee Member; co-created the event, led the educational design, & created the educational book • 1999) •••••



The Conference Steering Committee shared the goal of transforming Sonoma County's conversation about urban growth issues. We brought in author Eben Fodor to share his innovative ideas, which question common myths and offer new approaches. Then we presented panels of local environmentalists, businesspeople, and elected officials to explore these ideas and how we might include them in our local planning processes.

"I liked the entire program from beginning to end. I've done workshops and conferences all my working life – this was the best."

"I left feeling empowered and positive, rare for this topic."

"The resources book is fantastic. It helped my listening because most of my notes were already taken! I look forward to reading it and to making contact with the panelists."

"It was really a wonderfully-coordinated and highly-informative opportunity. Thank you!"

(Representative attendee comments from anonymous feedback cards.)

Author of a wide range of articles on environmental, health, and community issues (1992-present) •••••



Articles published in other periodicals include:

"Laguna Farm: Sowing Seeds of Sustainability" – Common Ground magazine

"Nurturing the Bounty of Local Organics" – Steppin' Out magazine

"Should Sonoma County Be GE-Free?" – West County Gazette

"Earthwalk: Reasons for Hope" – Sonoma County Environmental Impact Reporter

"Effective Political Action: Recovering Democracy's True Gift" – Sonoma County Peace Press

"The Roots of War, the Roots of Peace: Calling All Planetary Healers" – Sonoma County Peace Press

"Vision & Action Healing the World" – Sonoma County Environmental Impact Reporter



Educator Empowering Computer Users through writing, training, and training development (1982-1994) •••••

Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science, with a full major in Theatre Arts, Duke University, 1982, magna cum laude. Served as Chief Programmer for Individual Software, a tutorial software firm. Formed Complete Computer Solutions, where I empowered individuals and businesses as a trainer, training developer, consultant, technical writer, and author of 11 published articles.

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Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Can I Afford Solar?

Dear EcoGirl: I'd love to add solar to my home for the New Year. Is that reasonable with my tight finances? *Signed, Dreaming in Graton*

Dear Dreaming: Thanks for caring enough to consider solar. The good news is that solar is not only smart for the planet — it can be smart for your wallet too. How great is that?

Nine Reasons Solar Can Make Financial Sense

(1) You might actually lower your monthly expenses. If you now spend at least \$75 a month on electricity, you'll likely break even or save money with solar.

(2) You can get a loan for solar, so you don't need up-front capital.

(3) You'll be converting a current expense into an investment. Why not take what you're already paying PG&E for electricity and invest it in your home instead? Then you'll have a solar system to show for your payments, not just cancelled checks.

(4) You'll increase your home's resale value, often by as much as your system cost (not true for all improvement projects).

(5) You won't increase your property tax value. California exempts solar photovoltaic (PV) systems. It's the best of both worlds!

(6) You'll be taking advantage of current incentives that significantly reduce your system cost, including California rebates, federal tax credits, loan interest deductions, and (sometimes) time-of-use metering.

Important: Rebates are ratcheting lower over time and credits are subject to political whims, so it's smart to use these while you can.

(7) You'll watch your savings grow each year, as your energy costs stay fixed while PG&E's rates likely increase.

(8) You'll reduce your vulnerability to sudden price increases and energy supply interruptions caused by political unrest, weather disasters, and peak oil.

(9) You'll help protect our shared economic base. Our economy (and thus everyone's finances) depends on reliable energy sources and healthy ecosystems. To safeguard both, and avert serious crises, our culture needs to rapidly shift away from polluting fossil fuels. By buying solar, you're providing citizen leadership for this vital transition.

> **BONUS BENEFITS!** With solar, you'll also contribute to Sonoma County's inspiring targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions. (See <www.climateprotectioncampaign.org>.) Plus you'll eco-impress your friends and neighbors!

Making Your Solar Plan

So does solar make sense in your situation? To find out, identify your current electricity usage and your site's solar potential. Also explore ways to improve your home's energy efficiency, to save money immediately and reduce your solar system needs.

Here are some great resources to help you determine your specifics.

• **Estimated costs and paybacks.** Enter your present electrical usage at <www.solarworksca.com/estimator.html> and you'll get a ballpark calculation of your solar system size, cost, rebates, and paybacks in both money and GHG reductions. It's exciting to see the possibilities!

• **Local solar vendors.** For a more specific assessment, many solar companies offer a free on-site evaluation that identifies your solar capacity, suggests conservation measures, and estimates system costs. Their websites can also offer useful information about solar energy, system options, financial aspects, and more.

• **Solar Sebastopol.** Solar Sebastopol's website offers a list of local vendors (with links) plus an energy efficiency checklist and installer selection tips. They also hold public educational events, including one on Jan. 25. <www.solarsebastopol.com> 823-1153

• **Bank loans.** Because of your existing relationship, it's often simplest to

start by asking your mortgage bank about financing options. Some banks offer special loans and rates for solar and conservation.

• **Green Energy Loan.** With this innovative new program, you get pre-qualified by a participating bank, then arrange an on-site evaluation. The resulting report assesses your solar potential and offers efficiency recommendations (prioritized by projected savings). The upgrades you select are then included in the county's GHG reduction totals. <www.greenenergyloan.org> 280-0386

• **Doing it yourself.** Experienced handyfolk can get help from books (such as *The People's Guide to Basic Solar Power* <www.powerfromsun.com>) or an installer willing to advise (such as Nick Carter of npc Solar).

• **Learning more.** Further financial information is at <www.gosolarnow.com/pgfinance.html> and <www.pge.com/about_us/environment/solar/CSI_faqs.html>. Solar pioneer Real Goods offers solar systems and gadgets <www.realgoods.com>. Current industry information is at <www.seia.com>, including ways to support renewal of the expiring federal solar tax credits.

And so, there it is, your path to discovering if solar can indeed be for you what it's been for many others — an affordable dream come true!

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Ask EcoGirl

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Seeing Through Green Eyes: Remodeling Green on the Cheap

Dear EcoGirl: I want to know about green remodeling that isn't for millionaires. *Signed, Strapped in Santa Rosa*

Dear Strapped: Luckily, green doesn't have to cost more.

Sometimes it can seem that it does, as the consumer media can equate green with buying green products, which can be more expensive. And, yes, if you're going to buy a new product, look for an ecological one. (Avoid hype by asking what exactly makes the product green.)

But if your goal is to be earth-friendly and lessen your impact on the planet, and especially if you want to save money, **first consider how to avoid buying a new product at all.** Instead, follow the eco-mantra — “**Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.**” Then, what you do to be green can also lower your costs!

Because, while new eco-products are helpful, we won't stop our harm to the earth if we keep consuming at our current rate, even if all the products are labeled “green.”

So ask yourself, “What's my goal with this project? Can I use what I have, just in a different way? Can I repair, refurbish, or repaint to refresh the look and match my new design? Is there an opportunity here for creative expression?” I did this recently with an old porch table, repainting it in an artistic way that delights me every time I see it.

If you do decide to buy an item, look first at other people's discards. This saves you money, avoids the eco-impacts of producing and shipping new products, and reduces waste in our overflowing landfills. You can also often find unique pieces that bring style into your home —while meeting interesting people along the way!

Here are some great local places to find “previously owned” remodeling goodies.

- **Recycletown** (795-3660). Located at the dump (between Rohnert Park and Petaluma), Recycletown has doors, windows, tiles, chairs, lamps, gardening pots, bikes, exercise equipment, household items, and more, all at great prices. Go at least once to have a sense of what's there.

I recently got a great chair there for \$5. It didn't look like much, but I saw good lines and knew that some (non-toxic) stain and a new seat cloth would make it look amazing, which it does. It would've cost me a lot more at an antique store to get something with its great classic design! Plus, it's fun seeing what a little creativity can do. (I hung a small framed picture of the chair's original condition next to it, just for fun.)

- **ReStore** (568-3228). In Santa Rosa, Habitat for Humanity's ReStore offers surplus and salvaged building materials at significant discounts. Profits support their affordable housing work.

- **Sonomax** <www.SonoMax.org>. Few folks know about this great resource, where businesses offer free and cheap items in order to avoid disposal fees. Recent listings include windows, window coverings, red bricks, carpet, drywall, sinks, doors, insulation, appliances, red lava rock, paint, redwood, and compost.

- **Public websites.** Look for items and garage sales at <www.waccobb.net>, <www.craigslist.com>, and <www.pressdemocrat.com>. Or post a request and see what emerges from someone's attic!

- **Newspaper classifieds and thrift stores** (see the Yellow Pages).

For more places to explore, plus information about recycling your own discards, see your phone book's Recycling Guide (in the Yellow Pages under “R”). Look by category, for instance under Building Materials.

You can also get more green building information and local resources at <www.BuildItGreen.Org>. This site has a wonderful page outlining what qualities you might look for in a green product. (Look under “About Green Building” for “What Makes a Green Product?”)

So, yes, **the good news is that being cheap can actually be good for the planet** — when you look at your project through green eyes!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guide to Sonoma, Napa, & Mendocino Counties, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter.

Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. You can view previous columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Taming Our Tiny Ant Friends

Dear EcoGirl: Help! Ants are invading my home. How can I banish them without resorting to a toxic spray?
Signed, Under Siege in Guerneville

Dear Under Siege: Yes, it certainly can feel like an invasion when ants in their (quite reasonable) quest for food and shelter cross the boundaries of our homes.

Still, you're smart to resist the temptation to grab a poison spray, because it can harm the health of you and your family — and not even be worth the risk. A Stanford study found that toxic pesticides are no more effective than household cleansers in reducing home ant populations!

A better way to preserve both your health and sanity is to use these easy less-toxic methods for constructively managing one of our most prevalent earth companions.

Your First Steps

- **Eliminate what's attracting the ants.** Follow their trail to discover what food needs to be cleaned up, sealed up, or put in the fridge. Empty the trash and wash the can. If they've found your pet food bowl, place it in a larger dish filled with a soapy water moat.

- **Block their entry point.** Follow the ants' trail back to where it enters the house, and plug those holes with toothpaste or caulk.

- **Wipe paths with a clean soapy sponge,** to remove the ants' pheromone trail. For more potency, add vinegar.

- **Be consistent about keeping your kitchen clean,** wiping counters and putting food away. Avoid leaving food elsewhere in the house. I call these little guys "Housekeeping Ants" because (like a white-gloved matron)

they show me where I need more attention in my housecleaning practices!

Kick It Up A Notch

If, even after the above steps, your ants still persist in their misadventures, try these additional methods.

- **Remove outside attractants.** Look at the outside wall of their entry point. Is something there attracting them, such as a garbage can, compost pile, or vegetation? Consider pulling that away from the house.

- **Disrupt ant trails by placing pungent scents at key spots,** such as entry points and around unavoidable enticements like houseplants. Just strategically sprinkle dried or fresh herbs, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, chili pepper, bay leaves, rosemary, spearmint, catnip, and sage. (Use whatever you have around.) Or make a spray by brewing an herb into a tea; diluting essential oils with water; or warming orange peels in water.

If you want a ready-made option, consider the less-toxic insecticide Orange Guard, made from a by-product of steam-distilled citrus peels. All ingredients are FDA food-grade and GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe), and the product also works on other insects, such as aphids and fleas. Tests show that it has no significant toxicity to humans, though contact can irritate eyes or skin. Orange Guard is at stores (such as Sebastopol Hardware and Friedman's) or see <www.orange-guard.com>.

If It's Still Serious

For stubborn and significant problems, consider these next-tier approaches.

- **Use boric acid baits.** If you truly can't stop ants from coming into your home, this less-toxic pesticide can

eliminate ants at their nest. In addition to boric acid (a mined odorless white powder used for a variety of insects), most baits include a sweetening lure and come in a convenient liquid form. Place baits out of reach of curious pets and children.

Important: Read ant bait labels to avoid those with toxics such as arsenic, which can poison children, pets, and wildlife.

- **Hire an expert** who specializes in less-toxic remedies, such as bio-pest, 542-3030, <www.bio-pest.com>.

And, while protecting your turf, remember the big picture — that the 10,000 species of ants around the globe are an essential part of nature's miraculous interwoven systems. Plus these social insects can lift 50 times their own weight! How cool is that?

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