

ecology action center news



Volume 11, Issue 2

Summer 2013

Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk

By **Larrisa Armstrong**, Program Assistant

Join the Ecology Action Center for the eleventh annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on Saturday, June 29, 2013. This free event features beautiful and functional yards in our community that protect the environment, create a healthy and inviting space for animals and people alike, and use few or no synthetic chemicals in the process.

The walk is from 9:00am – 12:00p.m, after which lunch will be provided and Wild Ones' President, Sherrie Synder, will give a presentation on "Naturescaping with Drought-tolerant Natives."

This year's also event features a plant and Freecycle garden tool exchange. Please bring plants or garden tools to give away (for free), and maybe you'll find something you need that someone else donates to the exchange!

Highlighting yards in our community that utilize various methods of environmentally friendly lawn care practices may help others realize they too can have a hearty, beautiful, and functional yard without using harmful chemicals to maintain it.

The Yard Smart Garden Walk is free and open to the public; however, a \$5 donation to offset the cost of lunch is appreciated. Register by June 27, to receive your details on the event. You can register online at www.ecologyactioncenter.org or call 309-454-3169. Participants should bring their own lawn chairs and reusable water bottles for the lunch and presentation; the lunch is a zero waste event. Participants are encouraged to carpool during the tour to reduce pollution and conserve energy.

This garden walk promotes the Ecology Action Center's Yard Smart program which encourages local gardeners to reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, to conserve natural resources such as water and fossil fuels, and to make room for wildlife in their yards. Yard Smart Certification recognizes the efforts of people in the community who use ecologically sustainable practices to maintain their yards, and who realize their lawn, garden, and landscaping decisions impact and affect the health of the entire community.

More information on the Yard Smart program as well as a set of free resource fact sheets to help you become more

Continued on page 3

Mark Your Calendar

June 29 Yard Smart Garden Walk

July 2 Green Drinks

In This Issue

- Yard Smart Garden Walk
- Clothing & Textile Recycling @ Home Sweet Home Ministries
- Keeping Your Septic Tank Running Clean
- Your Monthly Radon Reminder



Local Option for Clothing, Textile Recycling

By **Kris Hall**, Assistant Director

Most McLean County residents have heard of Home Sweet Home Ministries and know them as a local homeless shelter and operators of the Mission Mart Thrift Stores in Bloomington and Lincoln. However, the services provided by this 95-year-old organization have greatly expanded in the past few years, and Home Sweet Home has become a valuable partner of the Ecology Action Center. Here are a few things you may not know, and some ways you can become involved.

New Warehouse & Donation Drop-Off Site

Last year, Home Sweet Home Ministries purchased and renovated the old Steak N Shake warehouse at 1700 West Washington in Bloomington. This has greatly expanded the amount of material they can process, and allowed them to expand the types of material they accept. There is a covered drop-off site in the parking lot which has labeled bins for household items, clothing, shoes, toys, books, electronics, and more. Many of these items are sold in their Mission Mart retail stores and proceeds help the HSH Ministries provide services to the hungry and homeless in our community.

But what about the items that cannot be sold? Here's where the recycling efforts come into play.

Clothing, Textiles and Shoes

After the Mission Mart items have been selected, the remaining items are baled and sent to various companies which recycle items into cotton fibers or rags or other materials while some items are sent along to other resale markets worldwide. Nothing is wasted, and that keeps millions of pounds of materials from going to the landfill. This recycling operation also raises money for shelter programs and provides over 20 paid jobs in Bloomington.

Electronics

HSHM has become a drop off site for residential electronics recycling. All parts of computers, televisions, game systems, phones, and nearly anything with a cord can be dropped off in their collection bins.

Household Items

In addition to selling donated items at the Mission Mart, Home Sweet Home Ministries also helps families transition from homelessness. Part of this process includes gathering the necessary household items for a first home. Donated kitchen equipment and linens might find their way to re-use in this manner!

Home Sweet Home Ministries has become a valued partner of the Ecology Action Center in a number of ways. When we host Mega-recycling events for America Recycles Day or the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo (ISLWE), HSHM is the organization who brings the big boxes and trucks to collect all the textiles, electronics and household items. They also provide workers to gather, sort and transport these materials! For the past two years EAC has spearheaded an effort in May to reclaim and reuse or recycle discarded furniture, food, and clothing from ISU students leaving town; HSHM is one of the partners who help collect these materials.

They were the main partner in our Renewable Fashion Challenge this year at ISLWE, and helped guide contestants through the process of finding fabulous outfits for pennies on the dollar at Mission Mart.

For all of their recycling efforts, Home Sweet Home Ministries recently won the Illinois Recycling Association's 2013 Outstanding Non-profit Organization Recycling Award.

Not only do all of the proceeds from all materials collected benefit *local* people and help solve *local* problems, but the collection, sorting and selling of these items also provides jobs, job training and community service opportunities for hundreds of individuals. Home Sweet Home Ministries is also a fabulous place to volunteer!

The Ecology Action Center is proud to partner with Home Sweet Home Ministries: a local non-profit that uses local labor to keep local waste out of our local landfill, and uses proceeds to address local challenges. You can become a partner too, by learning more at www.hshministries.org.

Don't throw those worn out soccer shoes or torn curtains in the garbage!

Drive them to Home Sweet Home's warehouse & donation center at 1700 West Washington.

ALL clothing, textiles and shoes, NO MATTER WHAT CONDITION THEY ARE IN, may be donated to Home Sweet Home.



Keep Your Septic System Running Clean to Protect Water

By **Michael Griffin**, EAC Intern

With the warm weather upon us, it's time to enjoy the days outside with your family and barbeque, but it's also the perfect time to do a little maintenance around the house. The best place to start is with your septic system. As of April 1, 2013 there are 9,376 septic systems in McLean County.

In McLean County, a typical septic system consists of a septic tank followed by either a seepage field or a sand filter. A septic system is a very simple design and has about four major steps in its process. First, all water runs out of your house through one main drain pipe into the septic tank. Next, the wastewater is held long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (sludge) and oil and grease float to the top (scum). The wastewater between the sludge and the scum is then discharged into the drain field. Finally, wastewater percolates into the soil, naturally removing harmful coli-form bacteria, viruses, and nutrients.

A septic system fails over time because suspended solids are washed out of the septic tank by wastewater being discharged. These small solids plug up spaces between soil particles in seepage field trench walls and between the sand in the sand filter. There are many signs of a failing septic system; the first sign will be a strong odor coming from your drains, toilets, and the septic tank and drain field. Other signs include wastewater backing up into household drains, which include the sludge and scum, bright green spongy grass on the drain field even during dry weather, and pooling water or muddy soil around your septic system or in your basement.

There are several easy ways to go about preventing these types of disasters with the

proper maintenance. One of the first things you can do is check to make sure that everything draining to the septic system has tight connections and operates correctly. Secondly, you will want to measure your sludge and scum layers in the tank (if you are unsure how to do this you will need professional help). Finally, exteriorly and interiorly inspect the tank for damage. During the inspections, further maintenance may have to be conducted, such as pumping the tank. This is typically done every 3-5 years, but pumping periodically is the best way to keep the system functioning.

To keep the system functioning at full capacity there are other things to also avoid, such as additives. There are around 1,200 different products containing enzymes and yeast, and research has shown some of these products can cause damage to the system. Garbage disposals also increase the accumulation of solids in the tank. Prevent heavy trucks or equipment from driving over the septic system, and do not build over it. Soaps and detergents in moderation should be the golden rule because overuse can kill the good bacteria in the septic tank. Avoid flushing cigarettes, paper towels, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, and disposable diapers. Finally, one of the most important things is to minimize water usage—the more water used, the more frequently you will have to conduct maintenance and pumping.

There are many reasons to keep a maintained septic system; most importantly it saves you money. Maintenance on a septic system will cost \$300-\$500 every 3-5 years but replacing a system costs \$3,000-\$10,000. Maintaining your septic system will protect your property value. This also keeps you and your neighbors healthy and helps protect the environment.

gardens, and find some inspiration for your own yard in the process!

Radon Reminder

The US Surgeon General and many others have warned that radon is the first leading cause of Lung Cancer, after smoking. Radon is 5 to 6 times more dangerous to your lungs than second hand smoke. If you smoke and your home has elevated radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is especially high. 4 picoCuries per liter of Radon is the action level – so if your radon test is above 4 pCi/L, consider fixing your radon problem.

Radon test kits are available at the EAC for \$10.00 each. These 5 to 7 day tests are simple, reliable, easy to use and you will get test results in 10 days after mailing in. Contact Ruth Ann Lipic, Radon Program Coordinator at 309-454-3169 with your questions and concerns.

Yard Smart, continued from page 1

Yard Smart are available at www.yardsmart.org.

Please join us on June 29th, to see some of the beautiful results of the time and love our neighbors and friends have put into creating healthy, safe, and functional yards and





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