



# Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society

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Promoting and Educating Environmental Stewardship

## Alternative Spring Cleaners: A Recipe for Good Housekeeping

I clean, you clean, we all clean. But, are you ready for spring cleaning? In the past half-century we have been besieged with household chemicals to make things brighter, whiter, shinier and more sanitary with less effort. Unfortunately, often these chemicals are not good for our environment.

### Chemicals aren't all bad

Chemicals are all around us. They occur in nature and in all activities that people undertake. The danger with chemicals in the home is the concentration and combination of both synthetic and natural chemicals we choose to use.

There are several ways to clean with household cleaners. The "lazy" way, finding shortcuts that fit your lifestyle and still do a satisfactory cleaning job; the "right" way, that's the way your mother has always done it!; or the "alternative" way, which is using environmentally safe products or creating recipes that aid in household cleaning. Being a savvy consumer who reads labels before using a product is also helpful.

### Cut grease, scour, disinfect

If you plan to use alternative cleaning products or make your own, take into **consideration the three basic functions of household cleaners: to cut grease, to scour (be abrasive) and to disinfect. The alternative cleaning products that work best for cutting grease are an acidic solution or a strong base, like vinegar. For scouring jobs, an abrasive product such as salt or baking soda does a good job. To sanitize or sterilize, a type of chemical that has antiseptic properties is needed, such as chlorine bleach or isopropyl alcohol—not lemon juice.**

So, what works the best for household cleaning and is safe for the environment? Here are a few recipes shown to be effective:

- **Oven Cleaner.** Pour vinegar over burned-on areas, shut the door and leave to soak. After two hours, wipe off the vinegar, rinsing the sponge or cleaning cloth frequently with warm water.
- **Copper and Brass Cleaner.** Add 1/2 cup salt and 1/2 cup of flour to enough warmed white vinegar to stir and make a soft paste. Spread cleaner on copper or brass. Let dry and brush off with a soft cloth.
- **Degreaser and Scum Remover.** Pour vinegar directly on the area and wipe with a damp, soft cloth. For lime and mineral deposits, soak a paper towel in vinegar. Apply the paper towel to the lime deposits on the faucets. Let stand one hour. The deposits will soften and can be removed easily with a soft toothbrush. Do not use on marble surfaces.
- **All-Purpose Cleaner.** Dissolve 4 tablespoons of baking soda in 1 quart of warm water. Put into a labeled spray bottle.
- **Glass Cleaner.** Mix 2 tablespoons of vinegar into 1 quart of water. Put into a labeled spray bottle.
- **Furniture Cleaner and Polish.** Mix 3 cups of olive oil and 1 cup of vinegar until well blended. Keep in a labeled container. Use several drops of polish on a soft, dry cloth and apply to furniture. Do not apply to marble surfaces.

Remember that these "natural" products are also chemical compounds and need to be treated as such. They may not do as well as other chemical household cleaners and you may have to use more "elbow grease" when cleaning. But, they are less toxic than commercial products. Most importantly, remember that water is the most important and least toxic universal cleaning solvent available.

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### Special points of interest:

- *Alternative Spring Cleaners*
- *Septic System Ongoing Maintenance*
- *Streamside buffers*
- **River Clean-Up June 12 @ The Vernon Commons registration 8 a.m.**

# Septic System Ongoing Maintenance

If you live in a rural area you probably have a septic system instead of a sewer connection. Taking care of your septic system isn't difficult, because modern systems function efficiently when you follow a few basic guidelines.

Use these tips to help you take care of your septic system.

## **Divert Rainwater From the Septic Drainfield**

- A soggy drainfield won't absorb liquid waste. Plan landscaping, roof gutters, and foundation drains to divert excess water away from the septic system.

## **Don't Overload the Septic Tank and Drainfield**

- Check faucets and toilets for leaks.
- Use aerators on faucets and flow reducer nozzles on showers.
- Reduce water levels for small loads of laundry.
- Wait until the dishwasher is full to run it.
- Use a displacer to reduce the amount of water needed to flush the toilet.

## **Keep Trees Away from the Septic System**

- Discourage root damage by keeping trees at least 100 feet away from the septic system.
- Trees with very aggressive roots, such as willows, should be even farther away from the system.

## **The Toilet Isn't a Garbage Disposal**

- Never flush cat litter, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, paper towels, facial tissues, coffee grounds, or cigarette butts and filters. They'll clog your septic tank in less time than you might imagine.

## **Use Garbage Disposals Wisely**

- A garbage disposal can double the amount of solids added to a septic tank.

## **Minimize Heavy Duty Cleaners**

- Overuse of heavy cleaners kills beneficial bacteria in the septic tank, so solids won't break down as well.

## **Do Not Pour Grease Down the Drain**

- Grease can clog the septic drainfield, making it impossible for soil to absorb liquids. If that happens you'll need a new drainfield.

## **Avoid Hazardous Chemicals**

- Varnish, paint thinners, motor oils, gasoline and other similar chemicals can ruin your system and are a hazard to groundwater. Dispose of them properly.

## **Protect the System from Damage**

- Do not drive over the drainfield, build a structure on top of it, or cover it with concrete or asphalt.
- Do plant grass on the drainfield to minimize soil erosion.

## **Perform Regular Maintenance**

- Solids must eventually be pumped from the tank. Many experts advise a family of four with a 1,000 gallon septic tank to have the tank pumped after 3-5 years of full time use.
- Never attempt to open the tank yourself. Gases and bacteria in it are dangerous.

# Agriculture/Residential BMP for the Month of May “Streamside Buffers”

If you own property along a stream or river these tips will help you take care of your streamside property. A streamside buffer ( riparian buffer) is an area of transition between a stream and an upland area consisting of native trees, shrubs, or other plants. Natural streamside buffers benefit both homeowners and the environment. Established streamside buffers, such as trees and shrubs, should be kept intact since preventing erosion is easier and less costly than repairing it. Therefore, the best care of an established buffer is often a hands-off approach. If you prefer a view of the river or stream, selec-

tively thin a “window” of low growing shrubs and flowers that also preserve the buffer and corridor for wildlife. A lawn mowed to the water’s edge can be transformed into a buffer by simply not mowing to the bank. Gradually, flowers and shrubs and then trees will emerge. To give your buffer a head start, plant native wildflowers, shrubs or trees. Remember the bigger the buffer the better the buffer. A fifteen-foot strip of small trees and shrubs with a ten-foot wide wildflower meadow can filter pollutants and stabilize the stream bank while adding color and texture to the landscape. The remaining lawn will be part

of the buffer and can still be used for gardening, picnics, and play areas. **This is the law: Some activities within 50ft of rivers, streams, and wetlands requires a state permit. These include: building structures, decks and boat docks, bank stabilization using rock, fill or other materials, and other activities that effect a stream, floodplain or wetland.**

## Top Ten Benefits of a Streamside Buffer

1. Increases property value.
2. Improves privacy and tranquility
3. Stabilizes banks and reduces erosion.
4. Reduces flooding during storms.
5. Filters sediment and pollutants from runoff.
6. Reduces the need for lawn care chemicals.
7. Provides shade for you and the fish.
8. Reduces time spent mowing the lawn.
9. Creates a colorful and eye-catching landscape to live in.
10. Attracts wildlife by providing food and shelter for a variety of birds, mammals, and other animals.



## Get Involved

Please call us if you are interested in volunteering your time in helping us clean our river. Contact Simeon Stearns or Sandra Clark @ 812-346-2953 or email us at forms@yahoo.com or

simstearns@hotmail.com or smclark2004@yahoo.com

We have an educational curriculum available which is correlated to Indiana Academic Standards. We would love to come into the class-

room and educate our youth on how to be a steward of this wonderful resource.

**Please join us Mother Nature will thank you.**

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Educating and Promoting  
Environmental Stewardship



This would be a good place to insert a short paragraph about your organization. It might include the purpose of the organization, its mission, founding date, and a brief history. You could also include a brief list of the types of products, services, or programs your organization offers, the geographic area covered (for example, western U.S. or European markets), and a profile of the types of customers or members served.

It would also be useful to include a contact name for readers who want more information about the organization.

## Inside Story Headline

This story can fit 175-225 words.

If your newsletter is folded and mailed, this story will appear on the back. So, it's a good idea to make it easy to read at a glance.

A question and answer session is a good way to quickly capture the attention of readers. You can either compile questions that you've received since the last edition or you can summarize some generic questions that are frequently asked about your organization.

A listing of names and titles of managers in your organization is a good way to give your newsletter a personal touch. If your organization is small, you may want to list the names of all employees.

If you have any prices of standard products or services, you can include a list-

ing of those here. You may want to refer your readers to any other forms of communication that you've created for your organization.

You can also use this space to remind readers to mark their calendars for a regular event, such as a breakfast meeting for vendors every third Tuesday of the month, or a biannual charity auction.

If space is available, this is a good place to insert a clip art image or some other graphic.



*Caption describing picture or graphic.*