SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

December 2009 **Island County, Washington** **Issue No. 62**

This issue was written by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator in Island County.

Some of the wintertime chores we take part in involve preparing for the summer months ahead. Removing rust from the garden tools that may have been left outside, cleaning your grill, and bringing back the luster to your brass house numbers are just a few of these projects that are normally done outside, where the harmful chemicals from commercial cleaning products can easily run off into Puget Sound. This newsletter will show you how to do these tasks using natural products that are commonly found in the kitchen or laundry, saving money and protecting the health of our marine environment at the same time.

Grill Cleaning Made Simple

One of the dirtiest chores in preparing for the upcoming warm months is cleaning the grills of your BBQ. In desperation, many end up using harsh chemical solutions, such as oven cleaner. There is a simpler solution to this problem, however, that is safer to the environment, and that is the use of washing soda. No, this is not laundry detergent, nor is it baking soda. Washing soda, otherwise known as sodium carbonate, is commonly made from the ashes of plants, and was a staple in our grandmothers' laundry rooms. The high alkalinity of washing soda helps it remove a large variety of stains, particularly when used in laundry detergent mixtures when hard water is present. It is also a great way to remove the baked-on residue on your grill grates. Not all stores carry washing soda; you may need to look around. It is typically found in the laundry products section, and sometimes located near either the "green" detergent section or where they carry other old-fashion products, such as bluing and starch. You will usually find packages made by Arm & Hammer, which is easy to spot. (You don't want the laundry detergents that contain washing soda; look for a package that states it is Washing Soda. It is not expensive.)

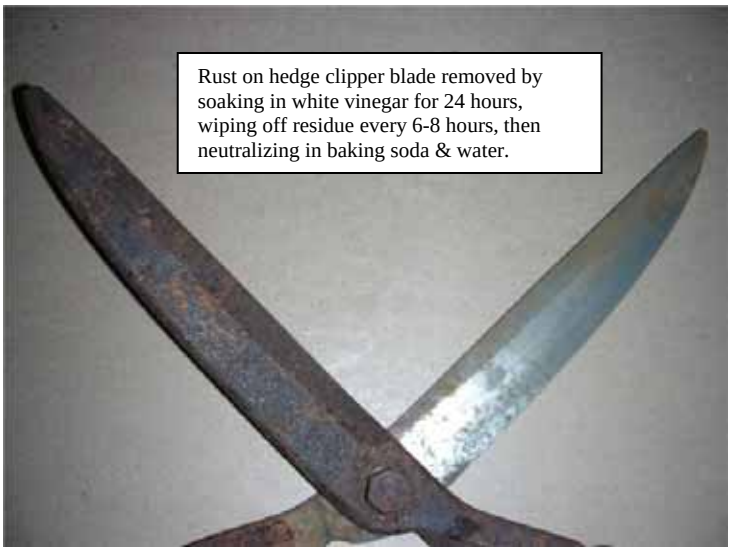
Propane grill grate with months of baked-on food, shown at left. Same grate, right, after soaking in washing soda solution for 24 hours and light scrubbing

First, find a location where this messy job can take place. You probably don't want to do it inside, or where children or animals can get into the washing soda solution. Maybe your garage, or garden shed. Second, find a container or tub large enough for the grates and any other parts, along with a couple gallons of water. I used a plastic container that was once used to store gift wrapping under the bed, before the lid broke. Place the grills and other parts flat inside the container. Mix 1 cup of washing soda with 2 gallons of warm water. (I used a plastic milk jug, mixing ½ cup washing soda with one gallon of water at a time, and repeated.) Make more if you need. Pour slowly over the grates, so that you don't splash. Soak grills overnight or longer. Using an old towel, 0000 steel wool (very fine grade, used for polishing), or stiff brush, wipe or brush off the residue, which should now be quite soft. When grime is removed, rinse with water and dry. You may want to coat these with a light coat of olive oil for protection. WARNING: washing soda is a caustic product. Wear gloves and eye protection when using, as it can cause skin irritation. If you splash it on yourself, you should wash it off with a baking soda solution.

Vinegar, the All-Purpose Potion

You are probably aware of how vinegar can be used for cleaning almost everything, from windows to coffee makers. Typically priced at two to three dollars for a gallon of house-brand white vinegar, it is also quite affordable. You have probably never used it as a rust remover, though, particularly for your garden tools.

A couple years ago, I lost a pair of hedge clippers: the long kind with wood handles that are great for cutting through small limbs, blackberries and brush. They turned up this summer, behind a compost bin I was moving. I had most likely placed them on top of the bin, where they fell off into the dirt in back, hidden from view. After a couple years in the dirt, they had a thick coating of surface rust, and could not be opened or closed. Rather than throw them out, I used pliers to remove the bolt and nut that held them together. I placed one of the blades into a plastic container, covered it with white vinegar, and left if for about 24 hours, wiping off the residue a few times during that time and returning the blade to the vinegar bath. I used a piece of 0000 steel wool (the finest grade) to wipe off the final residue. The blade was clean, with no rust in sight, though it had some surface pitting from the rust. Since the acetic acid in the vinegar would keep on working if left on the blade, eating away at the metal, I neutralized the acid on the blade with some baking soda dissolved in warm water, dried it off , and gave it a light coating of olive oil. Using the same vinegar, I repeated the process with a few other garden tools, as well as a rusty wrench. The results were as good or better than some expensive chemical-based rust removers, and much friendlier to the environment. (If you leave the dirty vinegar undisturbed for a few days in the container that contained the tool, the suspended rust particles will settle to the bottom. You can slowly pour the clean vinegar on top into a sealable container, to be used again for cleaning projects. Let the dirtied remainder on the bottom evaporate, and discard the dried rust.)



Rust on hedge clipper blade removed by soaking in white vinegar for 24 hours, wiping off residue every 6-8 hours, then neutralizing in baking soda & water.

Make Your Chrome Shine Again

Though chrome on the exterior of modern cars is not as widely used as it was a few decades ago, it is still used on some wheels and truck bumpers. It is also seen on handles of lawn mowers and yard equipment, bicycle wheels, motorcycle parts, and a variety of other outdoor locations. (You may even have fishing reels and other sporting goods that have some rust from their contact with water.) You can find expensive chrome cleaners sold in stores, but there are simple and inexpensive alternatives available that won't harm the environment. First, try washing the item thoroughly with soap and water, and drying it with a cloth. If there is rust or tarnish present, and the coating is light, first try using some very fine steel wool, grade 0000. This is called "polishing steel wool" due to its softness. Rub the chrome until the rust or tarnish disappears. If the rust is still present, make a paste of salt and lemon juice and let it sit on the item awhile. Rub with the rind of a cut lemon, rinse off and dry. Then use the 0000 steel wool. (Note: Use of steel wool is for chrome that has *already* been damaged by rust. Even the finest steel wool can leave very fine scratches on surfaces. First try this on a small area that is out of sight, and see how it looks. If it is to your liking, proceed with caution; you are the final decision maker on how this works for your situation.) Since steel wool can leave tiny fragments that can rust, many boat owners use bronze wool, which can be even softer and does not rust. Bronze wool is available at boat supply stores, and is relatively more expensive than steel wool. Note: the fake "plastic chrome" often found inside and outside most modern vehicles will not hold up to any strong cleaning. Do not use anything stronger than soap and water on "plastic chrome".

Brass, Bronze and Copper

Perhaps you've been thinking about shining up those house numbers that have become tarnished. Or bring a luster to your boat propeller, or other brass, bronze or copper items around your house or boat. First, check to see if the item is brass-plated steel by placing a magnet on it. If it sticks to the item, the base metal is steel. Since the brass coating is thin on plated items, use dishwashing detergent and warm water to remove any dirt, and then polish with a soft cloth.

Restore the shine on brass and bronze by wiping with Worcestershire sauce, as seen on right side of propeller.

For items that are *not* plated over steel, polish by using a rag with a bit of Worcestershire sauce; you'll be surprised at the results. The ingredients of Worcestershire sauce include natural cleaners such as salt and vinegar. Another method: sprinkle salt on half of a cut lemon, and use the cut end to polish the item. Rinse with warm water and polish with a clean cloth.

Cleaning Aluminum Lawn and Deck Furniture

If your have painted aluminum furniture, it is best to simply clean it with soap and water, and protect it with a light coating of wax. If the aluminum furniture is unfinished, you may have had it oxidize over months or years of exposure to the outdoor elements. This oxidation actually helps protect the aluminum from the elements, but no longer gives that "like new" shine. If the furniture is lightly oxidized, dump a cup or two of vinegar into a bucket of warm water. Use a cloth or sponge to clean off the oxidation. Rinse thoroughly, and dry off. (Note: you might want to test first in an inconspicuous location, like the bottom of the seat.) Do NOT use alkaline cleaners like ammonia or TSP on aluminum; these will cause oxidation!

Resources

There are a number of great resources that contain recipes for home-made, environmentally safe cleaning products. These cleaning products usually include common household ingredients such as baking soda, salt, vinegar, lemon, olive oil, cream of tartar, baby oil, hydrogen peroxide, washing soda, etc.

.

To see recipes that can be used on your boat, see the Shore Stewards newsletter from January 2007: www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/Jan2007Newsletter.doc

For indoor recipes, see the WSU Extension publication "Creative Cleaning", by Chris Koehler and Doris Torkelson: http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1758/eb1758.html

Note: Island County Marine Resources Committee, Northwest Straits Commission, Shore Stewards, and WSU Extension assume no responsibility and disclaim any liability for any injury or damage resulting from the use or effect of any product or information appearing in this publication. No endorsements are intended or implied.

Sign-Up Starts Jan. 4th for Sound Waters University

Take one day from your busy schedule and come to Sound Waters 2010 on Feb 6th, 2010 in Coupeville to learn about the health of Puget Sound! Whatever you have always wanted to know about island living, chances are you will find the answers in one place. Anyone can attend this instant antidote to the winter blahs – in the last few years this annual event has emerged as one of the top highlights of winter for hundreds of Island County residents.

Start the day by listening to Nat Scholz, a Whidbey resident and scientist at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He'll be discussing the ecological impacts of toxic stormwater runoff and what to do about it. Then take your choice of three additional 1 ½ hour classes from a list of over 60 choices. Classes range from shellfish to septic systems, orcas to stormwater runoff, fishing to ocean acidification, alternative energy to rainwater collection, and much more. Classes are taught by university professors, authors, enthusiasts, private-sector experts, and county officials. But first, you should circle Monday, January 4th on your calendar, because this is the first day that you can register for Sound Waters in 2010. Classes fill up quickly, and are "first come, first serve", so don't delay. You can register online at http://beachwatchers.wsu.edu/soundwaters , or call WSU Extension at 360-679-7327 for a printed copy of the registration booklet. (From Camano, call 629-4522, ext 7327.)

Though most classes are 1 ½ hours, for the first time there will be four 3 hour classes offered. One of those," Stewardship for Shoreline Properties", is taught by Island County Shore Stewards coordinator Scott Chase. This class will be both Power Point presentation and hands-on participation, and attendees of this class will receive a free shoreline homeowners toolkit. Topics will include:

- Building a rain barrel to conserve water and prevent erosion.
- Proper practices and plantings for septic drainfields to prevent pollution.
- How to maintain bluff stability and prevent landslides.
- Proper pruning techniques to improve the view without harming the tree.
- What to plant along shorelines and bluffs.

This "one-day university" is held annually at Coupeville Middle and High Schools by WSU Beach Watchers. Price for the full day is $35, which includes the keynote address and three classes chosen from more than 60 offered, plus snacks and coffee. A catered optional lunch may be pre-purchased for $7.00. Shore Stewards will be there with an information booth, alongside many other organizations that care about Whidbey and Camano islands and Puget Sound.

This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at www.islandcountymrc.org
The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at http://www.nwstraits.org/

If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter . Your Shore Stewards Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360)387-3443, ext 258, or email at shorestewards@wsu.edu .