

Homes & Real Estate

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EcoConsumer: Disposing of cat litter, and other concerns

Let's dig into the EcoConsumer virtual mailbag and share a few answers to enviro-questions from readers.

Special to NWhomes

Even with all the "green" resources now available at our fingertips, it can still be a struggle to find answers to our eco-quandaries.

Let's dig into the EcoConsumer virtual mailbag and share a few answers to enviro-questions from readers.

Q: My brother has apple trees on his property, but he's not able to pick the fruit. He would like to let a volunteer group pick the apples and donate them to a food bank. If someone falls out of a tree and gets hurt, will he be liable?

A: You are not liable for accidental injury of a fruit-picker when you allow the collection or gleaning of donation-bound fruit on your property, according to Washington's "Good Samaritan Food Donation Act" and a similar federal law.

Anyone who can't pick all their fruit should definitely consider inviting gleaning organizations such as the Seattle nonprofit City Fruit to harvest their crop and donate most or all of it to charitable groups. Call the Garden Hotline at 206-633-0224 to find gleaners in your community, but keep in mind that gleaners can't accept all harvest requests.

Q: A recent EcoConsumer column discussed getting rid of weeds without using chemical weed killers. I use an electric string trimmer on my weeds. What do you think of that method?

A: A string trimmer, or "weed whacker," does a good job knocking down weeds without using herbicides. Many weeds may come back up, since this method doesn't get the root, but at least this takes them out for a while. For greatest convenience, choose a cordless rechargeable model. You're smart to avoid gas-powered string trimmers. Smelly, polluting gasoline is a climate-changing fossil fuel, of course, unlike cleaner hydropower, the source of most of our electricity regionally.

Q: Is it OK to use a home air purifier that produces ozone?

A: Most households don't need an air purifier, but if you do, bypass the ozone models. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, relatively low amounts of ozone can potentially cause respiratory problems.

In an April, 2012, article, Consumer Reports recommended, "Air purifiers that emit even small amounts of ozone are a poor choice if someone in your household has pulmonary problems or allergy symptoms ... advise against using models that produce any ozone, even if they are

effective cleaners.”

Q: Many new energy-efficient appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines have much shorter life spans than appliances they are replacing (10 years, say, instead of 20 years), according to some repair people and store sales staff. Doesn't this negate their environmental advantages?

A: It may not negate the energy savings, but certainly could result in wasted resources. Seek out appliances that are both energy efficient and durable. Consider recommendations from friends, and consult online reviews and impartial sources such as Consumer Reports. You'll save money in the long run by avoiding cheap, poorly made products.

Q: What's the best way to dispose of cat litter?

A: Most area waste management agencies recommend bagging used cat litter and cat waste and putting it in the garbage. Don't toss any pet waste or cat litter in your collection cart for yard waste and food scraps, and don't put pet poop or standard clay-based cat litter in your backyard compost bin.

Q: What can we do with an old child car seat?

A: The White Center-based nonprofit WestSide Baby accepts all car seats for reuse or recycling, for a suggested donation of \$5 for any car seat that cannot be reused. Check WestSideBaby.org for drop-off locations, including one in North Seattle.

For recycling, reuse and proper disposal options for more than 100 categories of items, from old video tapes (electronics) to toilets (porcelain), consult King County's "What Do I Do With ...?" website.

"No questions are dumb, and all questions are great!" That's the informal motto of King County's EcoConsumer public outreach program. Thanks for asking, and keep the questions coming!

Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, and EcoConsumer is his biweekly column. He can be reached at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, 206-296-4481 or KCecoconsumer.com .