



TRASH TALK

CYNTHIA ROBERTS

Ubiquitous plastic and its many problems

Plastic is everywhere. It's in most of our household products from cars, clothing, cosmetics and children's toys to our water and food. Back in the 1950s and 60s plastic seemed like a great way to create inexpensive products to make everyday life easier. Today the real costs to our health and environment are becoming increasingly clear.

By my late 30s I suffered from a wide range of unpleasant symptoms classified as multiple chemical sensitivity. New cars, department stores, swimming pools, gas stations all became off limits. My body's detox systems could not handle the daily barrage of toxins. It was a gift in a way because I was highly motivated to learn about organic farming, water filtration, green building, herbs and nutrition, and other clean living choices that helped me function better. I'll always be a "canary in a coal mine" kind of person so I try to stay aware of all toxic exposures — including plastic.

Plastics are made primarily from oil and natural gas through a polymerisation or polycondensation process and many different synthetic chemicals and additives go into the various kinds of plastic. The manufacturing of plastic components and products is highly toxic to workers and to those who live near production factories. Emissions into the air and water create severe localized health issues and as they disperse become part of an overall threat to clean air and water worldwide.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Attracting sound and movement to a garden

The beauty of a garden of blossoming flowers is undeniable. Those of you who have visited Burchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia, in summer can attest to that. Anyone picking up a coffee table book of gardens, or flowers can agree. Seeing pictures of gardens is gratifying, but there is something missing from the pictures. Pictures lack the other dimensions of movement and sound.

To have a complete garden, you need the sound and movement that is furnished by living beings residing in the habitat you have provided for them.

Attracting birds, butterflies, toads, frogs, bees and other insects — yes, and spiders — to your garden will add the missing dimension to complete your garden.

Planting to attract creatures is the consideration being offered this week. Whole books have been written about attracting just one species of bird, or bees, or butterflies, so it is much too broad a topic for one little column in the paper. However, in broad terms, there are a few things you can do to increase your garden's potential.

Planting colorful annuals which bloom non-stop all summer will be a magnet for hummingbirds and the insects that bluebirds, swallows, and purple martins seek.

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Champagne, Shellfish And Chocolate For Valentine's Day Dinner



E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune-TNS

Mussels can be cooked myriad ways; this version keeps it simple with tomatoes, white wine, garlic and red pepper flakes, for a little heat.

A FANCY FEAST

By **Nick Kindelsperger**
Chicago Tribune

The last place you'll catch my wife and me on Valentine's Day is dining at a restaurant. Since I'm a food writer, I eat out nearly every day, and few calendar dates strike me with more fear than Feb. 14. See, Valentine's Day is one of a handful of occasions when everyone else decides that they have to go out too. Good reservation times vanish. Service becomes harried. Count in the cost of scheduling a baby sitter, and we might as well walk around with our credit card number plastered onto our foreheads.

Instead, we celebrate Valentine's Day at home, using it as an excuse to ignore the entire world (with the exception of our daughter). Plus, we splurge on items we'd hardly be able to afford at a restaurant. You know the good stuff: Champagne, shellfish and fancy chocolate.

Cooking at home, of course, is not without its own hassles. Sweating in the kitchen for hours to craft the perfect romantic meal can feel just as stressful as braving the wilds of the restaurant scene on Valentine's Day. That's why our menu consists of items that require the least amount of effort to prepare, yet make you feel like a million bucks.

Instead of dirtying a bunch of silverware,

we devour all the food with our hands, maybe because it's romantic, allowing us to satisfy some primal urge, but mostly since it's more fun.

Oysters need nothing more than to be opened. While this does require some finagling — and you will need to purchase an oyster knife for stress-free shucking, and an old towel helps avoid serious injuries — once popped, all you need to do is slurp away. Sure, some might like a squeeze of lemon or a drop of a vinegary mignonette, but if you score great oysters from a trusted fishmonger, why cover them up? We like to order a dozen, usually six from the East Coast and six from the West Coast, though we let the fishmonger direct us toward the freshest offerings.

Oysters slurped straight from the shell just beg for Champagne. It's no trouble to find a good bottle in the \$30 to \$40 range from a nice wine shop. While that's far more than we'd normally spend for a night at home, know that the same bottle would cost about \$100 at a restaurant. See how we're sort of saving money?

Plus, the next course is mussels. Even though you'll be purchasing the bivalves by the pound (3 pounds is about right for two), they are still among the most affordable shellfish options around. And they couldn't be

simpler to prepare.

Just create a flavorful base, add the mussels and cook until they spring open. Sure, mussels need to be cleaned and debearded — a five-minute job if you're counting — but they can be cooked in less than five minutes.

While there are innumerable versions of the dish (one of our favorites is with coconut milk and green Thai chile paste), this year we are going with a simple combination of tomatoes and white wine. Saute some onion and garlic, add some tomatoes and the wine, dump in the mussels and, three minutes later, dinner is served. The only way you could screw this up is if you forget the crusty bread to dip into the mussel-imbued liquid. Seriously, dunking fresh bread into the liquid is probably the best part, so don't forget that, OK?

And then we end with chocolate, because why wouldn't you? Usually, that just means a nice bar of dark chocolate, though we've been known to spring for a few chocolate truffles. Whatever your chocolate craving of choice, it will work here.

And that's it. With a minimal amount of effort, you have a shellfish-stocked meal, plenty of bubbly and never have to worry about asking for the check.

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From above the snow, from below the flowers

Before this last go-around with snow, ice and cold, I was still complaining that there should be snow for winter and February should still be winter.

I said that it should still be coming drifting down in silence to continue covering the dark earth at this time of year, at Christmas-time and after the New Year began and settle like lighthearted birds on pine and fir boughs in decoration. Let frost write its name on the window panes. It should be a time to let the earth rest while folks enjoy its novelty.

Maybe it would have been fun had the sleighs been brought forth



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART FLESHMAN

from sheds where they had been stored and then hitched to gaily prancing horses with jingling bells attached. The folks would wrap up in furs and robes so only their noses showed in order to glide across the snow.

With family and friends gathered about us, the trees outside sparkling with nature's ornaments as twinkling lights with orchestra music playing in the background,

I thought we should gaze out the window and see bundled children laughing and active while we cooked a big pot of soup to warm their inner sides when they came in from play.

No one should speak of shoveling snow from paths and roads or driving or falling on ice, the cold biting our hands and nose or freezing water pipes.

From the warmth of our houses, maybe we could see cheering revelers out-of-doors as we looked out the window as snowflakes drifted down... perfect for wintertime and those who look forward to skiing the mountain slopes.

Only when the calendar reveals

the month of March should we finish looking through our seed and floral catalogs.

Yes, I said, let there be snow in December, January, and early February to fill our memory boxes as we sit in class at school and write our Valentines for the box at the front of the room for later distribution. Now I say, let there be snow but only in a Bing Crosby movie while he sings "I'll Be Home For Christmas" as orchestra music fills in his piano solo.

As for myself as I spoke I started looking outside my window for yellow daffodils poking through the snow in January... and found them there.

Sweetly invisible: Adding scent to your home

By **Cathy Hobbs**
Tribune News Service

Sometimes it is the unseen that can make an impact on your home.

Fragrance is a silent yet powerful element that can influence the atmosphere and experience the moment someone sets foot inside your space.

Look for alternatives to unnatural elements such as plug-ins. Often these elements

introduce an artificial fragrance into the home, which can be unappealing.

Here are 4 tips to keep in mind for incorporating fragrance into your home.

- Burn a fire. Whether you have a fireplace or wood stove, the scent of a fresh fire can help add a winter element as well as an inviting sense of warmth.

- Consider natural elements such as lemons and limes, which automatically add a powerful

fragrance. Or, use fresh herbs and flowering plants such as sage, lavender and mint. They will automatically bring an inviting scent.

- Add accents such as diffusers and candles. They can help incorporate a continuous scent within a home. Infuse essential oils into your space either by using pure liquid sprinkled on key surfaces or using a diffuser.

- Use blooms, even in the winter. Adding fresh florals can improve nearly any space.