

Throw a happy spring party

Spring has a notorious reputation for cleaning. Have some fun by hosting a Happy Spring kick-off party to bring new exuberance to the season.

Tailor your guest list

Your Happy Spring party can be anything you want it to be. Start with the guest list. Ask your family who to invite. Will you have a formal family celebration, a party for your children's friends, or a neighborhood open house? The guest list will partially dictate the direction your party follows.

Decide on a theme

Here are a few Happy Spring party ideas to get your creativity in motion:

■ **April showers bring May flowers** — Hold an indoor flower potting party. Paint flower pots. Plant colorful flowers. Make a worm dirt cake. Give away potting shovels and gloves as favors.



Lisa Healy

■ Bike into Spring

Invite children in your neighborhood over to decorate their bikes with a variety of materials. When they are finished, take individual photos of each child and put them into photo frames for each child to take home when the party is over. Ask the kids to form a procession and have a bike parade throughout the neighborhood.

■ **Spring into Fitness** — Host an all-sports Happy Spring party to motivate your guests to think Spring fun and fitness. Organize runners by age group for a 50-yard dash. See how long your athletes can hop on one foot. Encourage wheelbarrow races if the ground is not too wet or

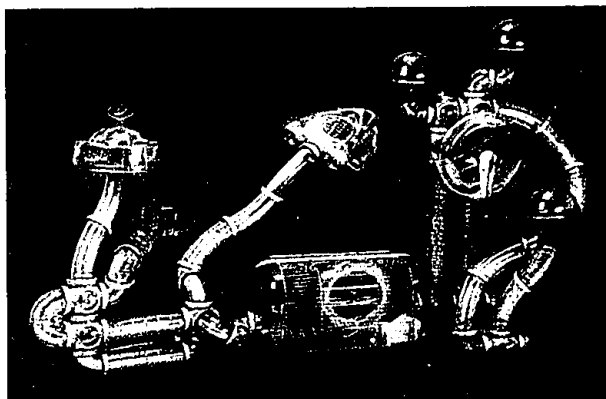
muddy from rain. Form teams for a neighborhood relay race (racers can pass anything from a baton to a potted plant or watering can). Award participants with a good, old-fashioned cook-out (weather permitting), personalized fitness T-shirts or tank tops, sport water bottles or certificates for their efforts.

Remember to have fun

After cleaning out closets, washing windows, and turning the ground over in preparation for spring planting, reward your family for their spring cleaning efforts. Your Happy Spring party is what you make of it. Perhaps your family's idea of welcoming in the fresh air is baking a cake, putting candles on it, and singing "Happy Spring to Us." The idea is to have fun together while you welcoming in the new season.

To leave Lisa Luckow-Healy a message from a local home phone, call (734) 953-2047.

Marketplace



Rocketing rodents: In a giant leap for hamster-kind, the Rolf C. Hagen Corp. has introduced the *Habitrail Space Station*, a sleek, modular habitat for hamsters that looks like an orbiting space station. It's been designed to accommodate the entertaining behavior of these little pets, from burrowing to playing and hoarding. It consists of a "core module," which is the main living area; there's also a vertical tube for "space walks," a space explorer starship, and a cosmic glow wheel for exercising. The basic unit has a suggested retail price of \$29.99-\$34.99. Add-on accessory kits are extra. The *Habitrail Space Station* is available at Petco, Petland Discounts, Pets Supplies "Plus" and independent pet stores. To learn more, visit www.hagen.com. Marketplace spotlights items available at retail stores in the Observer & Eccentric coverage areas. To submit an item for consideration, send a photo of it to "Marketplace," 805 East Maple Road, Birmingham 48009. Please include a contact phone number.

Stamp enthusiasts to gather

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
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Stamp collectors are generous people. If you give them something, they'll give you something back. At a recent West Suburban Stamp Club Meeting a young girl gave Charles Vomastek a stamp with a dragon on it from China.

"What do I owe you for it?" he asked. "Nothing," the girl said. "I know you collect China."

She collects birds, and has a surprise coming from her friend. "People who collect stamps are good quality people," said Vomastek who lives in Livonia and has been collecting stamps all his life.

He'll be one of the people participating in Michigan's largest stamp show, the 33rd annual APS-World Series of Philately, 10 a.m. to 5:30

p.m. Saturday, April 27 and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, April 28, at Plymouth Central Middle School, Church Street at Main Street in downtown Plymouth. There is no admission charge.

The show, sponsored by the West Suburban Stamp Club, draws collectors from Canada and nearby states, including Ohio, Illinois and New York. It also features 40 dealers from all over the United States and Canada. Collectors will compete for prizes and display their collections.

Every stamp has a story. "People collect stamps on any topic you can imagine," said Vomastek whose interest in Chinese stamps began when he visited the country. "We'll have a table for kids too."

He remembers the day the bomb fell on Pearl Harbor. "I was at my grandmother's house soaking stamps off

envelopes for my collection."

If you'd like to learn more about stamp collecting, plan to attend the West Suburban Stamp Club's next meeting, 7 p.m. Friday, April 19 at the Plymouth Historical Museum, 155 S. Main Street in downtown Plymouth. Wayne Sapulski of Livonia, author of *Lighthouses of Lake Michigan, Past and Present*, is the guest speaker.

The club has over 200 members, 40-50 come to each meeting. Members range in age from kids who are dropped off by their parents to longtime collectors like Vomastek. Meetings are held at the museum on the first and third Friday of the month. For more information visit the Web site <http://people.mw.mediaone.net/pnjstamps/twssc.htm>

Composite decks a new, long-lasting option

(AP) — For all the homeowners for whom yearly deck upkeep is a fate worse than taking out the trash, note that composite deck materials are here, and here to stay, according to a deck pro at Lowes Home Improvement Warehouse.

"Once composite material is installed, you can literally forget about it," says John Karlesky, lumber marketing manager for Lowes. "It won't rot, peel, warp, expand or contract, is splinter-free and it's virtually impervious to water and sun."

This is for people who want to enjoy their home without the hassle of deck repair. The average decks lasts 10 to 15 years. A deck with composites lasts indefinitely.

Composite deck materials initially weren't a viable option to wood. It took manufacturers nearly 10 years to achieve the right combination of wood chips and plastics to make composites worth recommending. Vinyl and plastic planks are a fraction of the market because installation requires different techniques

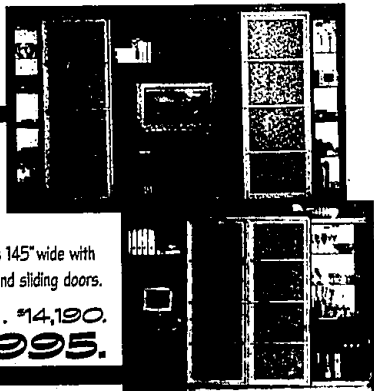
and equipment.

So why don't more consumers opt for composites? Karlesky says people simply don't know of the materials. Installation contractors haven't warmed to non-wood materials, fearing installation problems, but Karlesky says composites handle and install the same as the real thing. "It looks like wood, cuts like wood, installs like wood," he says, "and it doesn't take any more time to install than any other deck." And it's easier to buy.

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W-F 8:30-8:00; Sat 9:00-5:00**