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THE GREEN SIDE

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Toxins at your fingertips

By Christie Matheson, Globe Correspondent | May 21, 2008

'Tis the season for weddings, showers, graduations, and strappy sandals. Which means it's prime time for manicures and pedicures. Which, in turn, means it's a good moment for me to beg anyone reading this to reconsider the traditional mani-pedi. I'm not suggesting giving up hand and foot pampering entirely. But please, let's stop the nail-painting madness.

Conventional nail polishes are loaded with non-earth-friendly and nonhuman-friendly ingredients, including formaldehyde, dibutyl phthalate (DBP, likely an endocrine disruptor and harmful to the reproductive system), and toluene (a neurotoxin and harmful volatile organic compound). As for conventional nail polish remover, it generally contains acetate, a neurotoxin, and often contains acetone, a poison. And remember: Our nails may feel more solid than our skin, but they are extremely absorbent. Chemicals applied to the nails get sucked straight into the bloodstream.

What's a gal (or well-appointed guy) to do? Perhaps skip the polish altogether. Hands and feet can look gorgeous after a manicure and pedicure at a place that doesn't use bacteria-ridden, water-recirculating pedicure footbaths during which your appendages are scrubbed, massaged, moisturized, and maintained, but your nails aren't painted, just buffed to a shiny glow. (By the way, that will never chip.) My favorite spot for doing that is the Beauty Mark (33 Charles St., Boston. 617-720-1555), where each customer is treated to her (or his) own fresh bowl of warm water.

If you simply can't forgo the coat of color (I know, I know), please opt for one free of formaldehyde, DBP, and toluene. There are a few good lines out there. MiniLuxe (792 Beacon St., Newton Centre, 617-332-9200. miniluxe.com) features Zoya (zoya.com) polishes, while the Spa at the Chatham Bars Inn (297 Shore Road, Chatham. 508-945-6737. chathambarsinn.com) uses Spa Ritual (sparitual.com) products. Take off your own polish at home with No-Miss Almost Natural Polish Remover (nomiss.com). It's acetone- and acetate-free, which is a decent alternative to standard chemical solutions if you want to paint (and unpaint) your nails green.

Christie Matheson is the author of "Green Chic: Saving the Earth in Style." ■

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