



Home Owners: Help Keep Local Waterways Healthy

There's no question that everybody wants healthy streams, creeks and green spaces in their community for their family to enjoy safely.

Stormwater management — keeping excess runoff from rain and snow and the contaminants that they carry from polluting local water sources — is essential to maintain the health and well being of native fish and wildlife, as well as the quality of water that your family uses every day.

Home builders install silt fences and dig retention ponds to control stormwater runoff during construction. But once a community is completed, the way it is maintained makes a big difference to the health of nearby waterways.

Consider the following ways that you can help keep your community clean and healthy for the enjoyment of many generations to come.

Fertilizing

When it rains, lawns that are over-fertilized can wash pesticides and herbicides into the storm drains on your street, eventually carrying it to the local water source — possibly the source of your drinking water.

According to the Center for Watershed Protection, more than 50 percent of lawn owners fertilize their lawns, but only 10 to 20 percent of those home owners actually perform a soil test to determine the fertilization needs of the lawn. Before you buy your first bag, take time to do the soil test — you may find that you don't even need to fertilize.

If you do need to fertilize your lawn:

- Keep it on the grass, use it sparingly, and consider using organic products
- Hold off if there is a chance of a rain storm shortly after applying it to your lawn
- When you mow, don't bag the grass. The clippings will naturally fertilize your lawn. But sweep those fertilizer-rich clippings off the sidewalk and roadway so they don't go down the storm drain.

Trees

Planting a tree is a great way to help keep polluted stormwater from reaching storm drains. The roots help rain water filter back into the soil, cutting down on excess runoff.

As an added benefit, trees can help cut summer cooling costs by providing shade to the home, and in many cases they help increase the value of your home.

Gardens

Plants that are native to your region require less water and nutrients to survive and are more resistant to pests and disease — therefore less fertilization is required. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin has a searchable database to help get you started — visit www.wildflower.org/explore to see what flowers, trees and shrubs work best in your community.

Rain Barrels

Rain barrels collect stormwater runoff from a home's roof via the rain gutters. They hold the water temporarily, cutting down on the amount of water that reaches the sewer system. The water can then be used to water lawns and gardens.

Purchase your rain barrel at a local home and garden store or build it yourself — step-by-step instructions are available on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website, www.epa.gov.

These are just a few suggestions to help get you started on the road to a cleaner and healthier community. Get involved in your local watershed organization to find out how you can make a difference. Visit www.ongov.net and click on Save the Rain or visit www.epa.gov and searching for “surf your watershed.”



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