

HELP REDUCE WATER POLLUTION BY STARTING IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD

Stormwater, rain that runs off hard surfaces and eventually into local waterways, is a major and fast growing source of pollution that affects every watershed. This runoff may carry sediment, nutrients from lawns, waste from farms and pets, oil and litter from streets, and other contaminants into streams or storm drains. The following lawn and garden tips will help property owners partner with the township to manage stormwater and battle water pollution.

Getting a start in your own back yard

A “stormwater-friendly” lawn is one that can absorb rainwater and does not harm local streams due to the over-application of chemicals. Likewise, a “stormwater-friendly” garden is one that uses organic compost as fertilizer to amend soil and minimizes or eliminates the use of chemicals. Reducing chemical applications and encouraging infiltration will help stabilize local water flows and also maintain natural nutrient levels in streams. Stormwater-friendly lawns and gardens will help you save money on fertilizers and time on upkeep once they become established. Following the steps below will not only help protect local streams and rivers but can result in direct and substantial cost savings to homeowners.

- **Set mower height to 3 inches or higher.**

Taller grass slows the rate of runoff and produces a deeper, denser root system, which will absorb more water, prevent erosion, and suppress weeds. Deeper roots also have access to more water stored in the ground and can reduce the need for irrigation during droughts.

- **Retain grass clippings and chopped leaves onsite.**

A mulch-mower is ideal for retaining and spreading clippings on your lawn. The clippings decompose quickly, provide important nutrients for your lawn and settle to create an organic layer on the soil that encourages stormwater infiltration. This technique can significantly reduce or eliminate the need for nitrogen fertilizers. Also, by spreading grass clippings on your lawn, you can reduce the amount of fertilizer needed.

- **Keep clippings and chopped leaves out of streams, off the street, and out of storm drains.**

If mulching is not possible, bag the clippings and store them in a compost area where the organic material can be used as a fertilizer later. Blowing them onto a street or into storm drains deposits the clippings directly into local streams, where they decompose and become major pollutants by increasing nitrogen to unsafe levels for fish and other aquatic life.

- **Fertilizers for your lawn..do you need them?**

Many lawns do not need fertilizer because they are already fertile or you have carried out the previously discussed practices. Using no fertilizer is ideal for stream health, but if your lawn is thin or has bare spots, you should consider fertilizing it.

Home gardens can contribute a considerable amount of nutrients and other pollution to streams and other water bodies if not cared for in a responsible way. This mainly applies to fertilizers and pesticides so here are some options:

- **Garden fertilizers:**

Organic alternatives to chemicals include compost or manure. Compost can be created in your own back yard, is free, and contains the many nutrients needed for your vegetables. Also, be sure to apply organic fertilizers before planting to prevent runoff.

- **Pesticides:**

When it comes to pesticides, identify the pest and research your options. Many insects are harmless to people and play an important role in maintaining a healthy lawn or garden ecosystem. If there is a problem, however, identify the exact pest you have. Consult an expert because there are many nonchemical alternatives to controlling pests. Pesticides can infiltrate the ground water, contaminate drinking supplies, and severely harm downstream ecosystems if applied incorrectly or unnecessarily.

In the long run, little actions, such as taking a stormwater-friendly approach to your garden and lawn, will have a big impact as all of us work together to protect our water’s quality.