Derek Burr, Director
Department of Development Services

JEFFCO H_2O NEWS

ISSUE 36 - SUMMER / FALL 2021

In this issue:

The Middle

When it comes to stormwater pollution, the middle is where it all happens! From your roof to the nearest waterway, any material on the ground or exposed to rain can become a pollutant. Some examples of these materials include yard chemicals from landscaped areas, loose soil from construction sites, automotive fluids from parking lots, and litter from roads. Stormwater picks up these materials from the ground and carries them into the storm drainage system. The storm drainage system then empties this untreated stormwater and the materials it carries directly into our waterways. When you consider that 656,851 people live in Jefferson County and our annual rainfall is about 55 inches, the amount of stormwater pollution that we generate is substantial. Managing stormwater in your yard is a good place to start in reducing stormwater pollution in our waterways. Anything that slows down stormwater, spreads it out, and allows it to soak into the ground will make a positive difference in our water quality. Creating natural areas and planting trees in your yard are excellent ways to reduce the amount of stormwater leaving your property. Depending upon their size, trees can absorb hundreds of gallons of stormwater every year. In addition, the leaf canopy slows falling rain drops while the root system helps anchor the soil and reduce erosion. When selecting and planting a tree, make sure that the site you choose will accommodate its full grown size as well as its water and sunlight requirements. You also might consider using pavers to transform some existing high-maintenance turf areas into permeable patios or paths. Pavers that are set into sand or gravel are a decorative and easy addition to your yard. Pavers are a good landscape choice because they allow stormwater to soak into the ground. Your new path or patio also will reduce yard maintenance since it won't require watering or mowing!

What's Happening ?

Electronic Collection Event - Saturday, October 9, 9 am - 11:30 am - Got some old or unwanted electronics, or paper in need of shredding? Bring them to this FREE drop off event. Open to all residents of Jefferson County. For event location and what to bring, click HERE.

Got Four Minutes? - In the time it takes to make a cup of coffee, you can help us do a better job in getting the word out about keeping Jefferson County's waterways clean. Your input will assist us in discovering what we are doing right and where we need to concentrate efforts next year. Get started HERE!

Alabama Cooperative Extension System - Virtual Webinars - Alabama Cooperative Extension System offers an array of new lawn and garden webinar topics, Q&A sessions, and virtual farm tours as well as favorite topics available on demand. Click HERE to browse through the topics and register.

The Intrepid Gardener - by Hana Berres, Education Training Coordinator

It's been a minute since we've checked in with our favorite gardeners Hana and Mr. T. This time, Hana revisited the results of projects she implemented to manage water in the yard and added some additional features. Let's check in with her to see how these changes have helped improve her landscape.

Dirt, Only Better !

Some people call it organic fertilizer. Others call it black gold. Whatever the name, compost is a free, renewable source of nutrient dense material that can be used in multiple ways in your yard. Compost is the natural result of decomposing organic materials and contains a variety of nutrients that plants need to grow. Organisms such as earthworms, beetles and snails munch away on these organic materials and break them down into smaller bits. Microscopic bacteria and fungi go to work on the leftovers and handle the chemical end of decomposing. Even though it sounds icky, the result is a rich topsoil-like blend of exactly what most plants need to thrive. Starting a compost pile at home is not difficult and does not require much space. Depending upon weather conditions, your pile can yield usable compost in as little as a few weeks. To get started, identify the area in your yard where you will establish the compost pile. Begin by adding a combination of green and brown organic waste and some water to the pile. Materials needed to start composting can be found in your yard and kitchen. Rather than sending yard debris and kitchen waste to the landfill, add them to your compost pile. Occasionally stir the ingredients to expose the layers to air in order to assist the decomposition process. Once your compost pile has transformed into dark, crumbly material, and you can't identify any of the original ingredients, it is ready to use. With our relatively mild winters here in Alabama, composting can continue almost year-round. Besides being a rich organic fertilizer, compost can help transform clay or sandy soil into a more plant-friendly composition. Compost also increases the soil's ability to retain moisture, prevents weeds from growing, and helps stormwater soak into the ground. According to the EPA, for every 1% that you increase the organic content of soil, you also increase its water absorption capacity by 16,000 gallons of water per acre of land. The beneficial organisms that compost introduces into your soil help perpetuate the value of composting by continuing the cycle of organic decomposition. Fall is the perfect time to install new plants, trees and shrubs in your yard. The availability of your homemade compost will provide numerous benefits to any landscape additions you make. Check out Alabama Cooperative Extension's publications Backyard Composting and Backyard Composting Tips. You've got this, so why not give it a try?

The Invaders - by Andrew Martin, Landscape Architect

In a 2005 study, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that the economic damages associated with invasive species in the United States was approximately $120 billion per year. A significant portion of this damage is associated directly with non-native, invasive plant species. Invasive species will often outcompete native plants and have few predators that keep the species in check. As a result, the introduced species can destroy native plant communities and wildlife habitat, as well as degrade soil and water quality. With such a devasting impact, it's important to always consider the ramifications for introducing new plants into your property—whether that's a farm, forest land, suburban yard, or urban garden. Non-native plant species can spread locally by water, wind, birds, and animals, but they are almost always introduced through human efforts. While some of these introductions are unintentional, many are not. In fact, many invasive plants are still sold by local nurseries and readily planted in residential yards as ornamental plants. Some commonly sold and distributed plants in central Alabama are English ivy, Chinese wisteria, thorny elaeagnus, nandina, bamboo, and Callery pears. Introduced as ornamental garden plants, each of these species has proven to be invasive and problematic to our local ecology. Sadly, people still continue to propagate, sell, and plant these species around homes and gardens, not knowing the negative ecological and financial impact they can have on a property. Once the plant has become established in a local landscape, it can be very difficult and costly to eradicate or manage. Thankfully, there are many native species that can be substituted for the non-natives. Alabama has an abundant diversity of native flora, and there are many species that can add lasting value to a property. Before you purchase any plant, take some time to research the plant to ensure that the species is either native or, at minimum, non-invasive. Click HERE for photos of invasive plants to avoid and HERE for a comprehensive listing of Alabama native plants to consider!

For Unincorporated Jefferson County: Call 325.5792 to report suspected water pollution - Call 582.6555 to report illegal dumping