



JEFFCO H₂O NEWS

ISSUE 21 - FALL/WINTER 2017

Fabulous Fall | Treescaping | What's Happening | Making a List, Checking it Twice | The Persistence of Plastics

Fabulous Fall



Colorful autumn leaves are so beautiful - until they fall all over your yard and become a huge weekly project of raking and bagging. You can greatly reduce the time and effort it takes to deal with fall leaves while getting some [FREE benefits](#) for your lawn and landscape. Just set the blade on your mulching mower a little higher than usual and [run over the leaves](#). The mower will chop the leaves into little bits which will slowly decompose, providing a big dose of nutrients for the soil. Another option is to attach the bagger to your mower before running over the leaves, and apply the collected leaf particles to your garden beds or compost pile. The leaves will provide cover for bare soil, insulate beds during the colder months, and gradually improve the soil as they decompose. There are other tasks to address in the fall in order to help your property do well in the colder weather and prepare it for the spring growing season. This is the time to purchase and plant spring flowering bulbs, winter annuals, and shrubs and trees. If you are doing any type of landscaping or remodeling, make sure loose soil remains in your yard. Soil washed by rain into creeks harms aquatic life and water quality. Since most lawns in our region go dormant in the fall, fertilizing is not recommended since the lawn will not uptake the nutrients. If you choose to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to your lawn, always follow label directions for safe application and disposal since the chemicals can be carried by rain into the nearest creek. Taking just a few precautions this fall can make a big positive difference in your watershed.

Treescaping



Trees are one of the most defining elements in a landscape and often are the most endearing. Scientists have shown that living in communities that include trees can reduce crime, ease stress symptoms, and increase feelings of well-being. Trees aren't just a feel-good addition to the landscape; they have economic value as well. The American Forestry Association estimates the economic value and environmental benefits of a tree at \$57,000 over a 50-year lifespan. A well maintained landscape with mature trees and bushes can increase property values by as much as 20%. Properly placed shade trees can reduce summer cooling costs by up to 50%. In the winter, these same trees block wind, thereby lowering heating costs. Trees reduce the amount of stormwater leaving your property and hold soil in place. Trees also add oxygen to the atmosphere: two mature trees produce more oxygen than one person consumes. Fall is the perfect time to plant a new tree in your yard. But choosing and planting a tree should never be an afterthought since your choice and its impact will be felt for years to come. If you haven't already done so, it's best to decide on an overall [landscape plan](#) and then choose where a tree or trees would best fit within and enhance that [plan](#). For example, you would probably place a large shade tree in a different location than a small ornamental tree. Once you decide [where](#) you would like to plant a tree, choose the right tree for the location and conditions that it will face. Make sure that there is plenty of room both around and above the site for the tree to mature, and [plant the tree](#) correctly for its size and location. With proper planning, tree choices and installation, you will enjoy your tree for many years to come.

What's Happening

Birmingham Botanical Gardens Fall Plant Sale - October 21-22 - This is a great opportunity to purchase native plants and trees just in time for the optimum planting season! Visit bbgardens.org to learn more.

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day - October 28 - Safely dispose of old or unwanted prescription drugs at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Center Point Substation (2651 Center Point Road 35215) or McCalla Substation (5725 Eastern Valley Road 35111) from 10am until 2pm. Visit [the DEA website](#) for more information.

Brown Bag Seminar Series - Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 2612 Lane Park Road, Birmingham. Get the [scoop](#) on what to buy and plant this fall!

Cease the Grease - Got used cooking oil? Remember that Jefferson County's free household cooking oil and grease recycling program offers clean plastic jugs and recycling kiosks conveniently placed at [20 locations](#) throughout Jefferson County.

Coming Soon!!! Stop by the Development Services Department, Room 260, for a FREE 2018 Stormwater Calendar filled with great places to visit and experience in Jefferson County as well as lots of helpful stormwater friendly tips!

Making a List, Checking it Twice



Ah, the holidays! With so much to do and so little time to get it done, sustainability is often not on the to-do list. However, there are some ideas and practices that are not only ecofriendly but also can save precious time and money at this busy time. When you are out doing other errands, make your trip more efficient by shopping for both gifts and food, especially if they are locally made and grown. Making and giving homemade items, planning an experience to share, or making a donation to a charity are all great sustainable gift ideas, particularly when you consider that 35% of Americans have an unused holiday gift collecting dust in their closet. Decorate with nature whenever possible by incorporating real greenery, wood, burlap or other natural elements into your design. Get creative when it comes to wrapping gifts. If every American family wrapped just three presents in reused materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields. Opt for energy efficient LED lighting and use timers to control when the lights are on. These easy measures can save up to 90% on power costs by making the switch. Cut down on the trash you generate by skipping the disposable tableware and paper goods by bringing out those dishes, tablecloths and napkins reserved for special occasions. Serve beverages such as coffee, fruit punch or iced tea made in quantity rather than offering individual drinks. This is much less expensive and reduces the waste from packets, bottles and cans. Create less food waste by planning food purchases and portions, and researching ideas for using leftovers. There are many recipes online for leftover turkey, ham and sides which can be made into a tasty casserole and popped into the freezer ready for a quick meal. Consider buying a live tree rather than a cut tree. A live tree can keep on thriving for years to come, removing air pollution and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. So how can doing one or even all of these things really make a difference? The more people who choose to make sustainability a priority during the holidays and beyond, the greater effect there will be on preserving and conserving our natural resources.

The Persistence of Plastics



Look around where you are sitting. Chances are most things in your line of sight have some plastic in their composition. Plastic has been around in some form or fashion since it was created in 1869. During WWII, plastics became an increasingly important commodity to offset and preserve scarce natural resources. Seen as a relatively inexpensive and limitless resource, mass production of consumer plastic goods skyrocketed in the ensuing years. Light weight, durable, and malleable, plastics made possible the creation and development of many important innovations in technology and medicine. As our lives became more and more dependent upon plastics, eventually a few downsides began to emerge.

Probably the most dramatic is the sheer amount of plastics that we discard. In the US, 34 million tons of plastic are disposed of each year; only 6.5% of that is recycled and 7.7% is combusted in waste to energy facilities. Unlike most solid waste, many plastics take thousands of years to decompose. Much of the world's plastic waste is either littered or illegally dumped, and is carried by rain into creeks and rivers which empty into our oceans. It is estimated that nearly 9 million tons of plastic entered the ocean in 2010. Currently there are five major trash patches in the world's oceans; the largest is the [Pacific Trash Vortex](#) in the north central Pacific Ocean. While much of the plastic in these patches does not decompose, it does break up into tiny pieces. Sea animals often mistake these plastic bits for food and ingest them or become entangled in larger pieces. Some plastics do [decompose in the ocean](#); their chemicals leach out into the water and are absorbed or ingested by fish and birds, thereby entering the food chain. Humans are exposed to varying levels of plastic throughout their lives, and the long-term effects of those exposures are not completely known. Since plastics play such a major role in our daily lives, it would be virtually impossible to stop buying, using, and disposing of them. However, there are ways to be more [intentional](#) with purchases and more responsible with disposal. The obvious is to cut back on the number of disposable plastic items that you purchase (think cups, plates, eating utensils, bottled water), decline unnecessary plastic items (grocery bags, [straws](#)), replace plastic items with those made from more sustainable materials when it's time to buy new, and recycle rather than just discard whenever possible. And really, do we even need to mention please don't litter?