



Take Action! Protect Water Quality

Suggested below are a number of actions you can take to protect water quality. They are in no particular order – focus initially on those that are easiest for you to accomplish. Check off each as you complete it or incorporate it into your land-care routines. Set a target date for accomplishing all of the recommended activities. Explore the Resources and Links we’ve provided for further guidance.

- IDENTIFY your watershed.** Learn where the water that drains off of your property goes. Which river, streams, lakes, or other water bodies are affected by your actions?
- TEST your soil** before applying fertilizers or other nutrients to avoid over-application.
- REDUCE pesticide use.** Pesticides can contaminate water through surface runoff into streams and lakes and by leaching into groundwater. Take stock of your pesticide use and see where you can make changes.
- PATCH bare soil areas** in your yard to prevent erosion and runoff. If the exposed spot is within your lawn, choose a native grass or groundcover. If it’s under a tree in heavy shade where nothing will grow, mulch the area to avoid compaction.
- SWEEP, rather than hose** down, sidewalks, driveways, and other impervious surfaces.
- USE a funnel** for pouring when filling your lawn mower or other gasoline-powered tools. The EPA reports that tens of millions of gallons of gasoline are spilled each year while refueling garden equipment.
- DISPOSE of pet waste** in the garbage – not in the street or where it can be carried away by precipitation.
- MANAGE landscape projects properly.** Disturbed soil is susceptible to runoff during planting, installation of irrigation systems, patios, paths, or other landscape elements. Schedule work during dry weather seasons and replant as soon as possible to prevent erosion. Shovel construction residue into the garbage; do not wash it down the storm drain.
- MINIMIZE lawn area and implement healthy lawn care practices.** Large lawns with non-native grasses consume overdoses of pesticides, fertilizers, and water, which can contribute to contaminated runoff. Initiate the effort by expanding a garden border and letting the grass grow to at least three inches before you mow.

- ❑ **REPLACE paved surfaces**, such as a garden path or driveway, with porous material. Choose an area to be replaced with a substitute material. Native grasses and groundcovers, mulch, gravel, brick, and sustainable wood decking are some alternatives that allow rainwater to seep into the ground. Begin small and expand.
- ❑ **USE RAINWATER to your advantage.** Collect or divert runoff from your roof and create a rain garden. Direct the runoff from your roof to a low spot in your yard planted with native wetland plants allowing the water to seep into the ground rather than stream down your driveway, picking up pollutants on the way.
- ❑ **MAINTAIN a natural buffer zone** between your landscaped area and any ponds or streams to prevent bank erosion and to filter contaminants. Allow the native vegetation to grow high or plant with native water-loving species.
- ❑ **AVOID planting trees too close to septic systems.** The roots can crack pipes and cause wastewater seepage.

RESOURCES/LINKS

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Watershed Information Network
Tools to identify your watershed and resources to help you protect it
<http://www.epa.gov/win/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 Polluted Runoff (Nonpoint Source Pollution)
Information and resources for reducing nonpoint source pollution
<http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/whatis.html>

Cornell Cooperative Extension
 The Homeowners Lawn Care Water Quality Almanac
Learn how to take care of your lawn without contributing to pollution of your watershed
<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/gardening/lawn/almanac/index.html>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 Backyard Conservation Tip Sheet: Nutrient Management
Tips on soil testing and proper application of fertilizer and other soil amendments
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/NutMgt.html>

Reduce Pesticides!
Audubon At Home web resources for responsible pesticide use
http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/reduce_pesticides.html

Connecticut River Joint Commissions
 Backyard Buffers
Publication explaining the importance of streamside buffers and how to create one
<http://www.crjc.org/buffers/Backyard%20buffers.pdf>

Virginia Department of Forestry
 Rain Gardens
General guidelines for rain garden creation
<http://www.vdof.org/rfb/rain-gardens.shtml>