

## Planning Springtime Yard Projects? Don't Forget the Water (Quality, That Is)!

The snow is melting and we are starting to see warmer days. Many people are beginning to think about spring yard care – fertilizing, landscaping, and generally getting outdoors to work around the yard. In the excitement of spring, don't forget that the choices you make on your property affect our water quality. Residential lawn runoff often carries nutrients, sediment, pesticides, and bacteria which pollute our waterways and contribute to algal blooms. Fortunately, with a few simple choices, you can do your part to help improve our water quality, and beautify your yard in the process!

- Rain barrels are a simple way to reduce stormwater runoff from your property. The water captured from your downspouts can then be used to water landscaping, your garden, or house plants.
- Native plants are plants that have historically grown in our region; they were not imported from other countries or regions of the United States. Native plants are beneficial for our environment in many ways. Their deep root systems soak up stormwater, reducing runoff and the accompanying pollution. Native plants require less maintenance (watering, fertilizer, pesticides) because they are well adapted to our region's climate, pests, and diseases. These plants also provide important food and shelter for our native wildlife, including songbirds and pollinators like butterflies.
- Rain gardens and shoreline plantings are specialized landscaping projects that utilize native plants and can greatly improve water quality. Rain gardens are shallow landscaped depressions located in an area that receives stormwater runoff, often near a home's downspout. A rain garden fills up with rain during a storm event and the water infiltrates into the soil within 24-48 hours. Native shoreline plantings are strips of native grasses and flowers planted next to a pond, stream or lake that help intercept runoff flowing into the water, stabilize soil with their deep roots, and provide wildlife habitat for both aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.
- Using phosphorus-free fertilizer or no fertilizer at all on lawns reduces nutrient runoff and typically does not adversely affect the health of the lawn. A simple, inexpensive soil test can reveal which nutrients (if any) your lawn is lacking. By only applying the nutrients your lawn needs, you can reduce the amount of pollution washing off your property.
- Finally, while it's not a landscaping project, remember to pick up your pet's poo. Springtime rains wash those piles straight into the storm drains, sending bacteria and nutrients to a nearby stream or river.



For more information on these clean water practices and why they are important, visit [www.ClearChoicesCleanWater.org](http://www.ClearChoicesCleanWater.org). Once you have decided to embark on one of these projects, or if you already have, be sure to take the pledge on the website. You can also view an interactive map to see who else is making a clear choice for clean water!