What to Do in Your Landscape and Garden

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The choices you make in your landscape or garden can either help prevent nonpoint source pollution or contribute to it. Request Action Guide #1 for a discussion of nonpoint source pollution.

In the meantime, follow these tips:

- Don’t water the pavement! It won’t grow!
- When designing your landscape, reduce grass areas and use plants that have low requirements for water, fertilizers and pesticides.
- Minimize impervious surfaces by installing wood decking, bricks or interlocking stones instead of impermeable cement. This will decrease runoff.
- Create a landscape buffer between lawns and impervious surfaces. This helps minimize runoff and creates a buffer to compensate for wind drift during watering.
- Check your sprinklers several times during the season to make sure they are functioning properly and the direction of spray has not shifted.
- Change the time on automated sprinkler systems as the weather cools or warms. Turn off the system if your landscape received enough water from rainfall that day. Don’t water in the middle of a rain storm!
- Use landscaping techniques such as grassy swales (low areas in the lawn) or porous walkways to increase infiltration and decrease runoff from your property.
Reduce storm water runoff from your site by redirecting rain gutters onto vegetated or mulched areas, rather than bare soil or pavement. Your plants will benefit from the extra water and you’ll avoid polluted runoff.

Disperse runoff by grading all impervious surfaces, including driveways and walkways, so that they drain onto vegetated areas. If driveways are already in place, infiltration trenches may be installed to capture runoff from driveways and allow it to infiltrate into the ground.

Leave lawn clippings on your lawn so that nutrients in the clippings are recycled. This will reduce the frequency and amount of fertilizers you need to apply and will reduce yard waste that ends up in the landfill.

Restore bare patches in your lawn as soon as possible. Spread mulch on bare ground to avoid erosion.

Another way to reduce waste is to compost your yard trimmings. Compost is a valuable soil conditioner that gradually releases nutrients to your lawn and garden. Compost also helps retain moisture in the soil, helping you conserve water.

Litter, leaves, sediment and other debris can clog storm drain systems and result in flooding. To prevent this, keep street gutters and storm drains free of these materials. Although major municipalities are responsible for maintaining storm drain inlets, there are too many to maintain frequently. You can help by frequently checking the street gutters surrounding your property and keeping them free of debris.

When plants decompose, nutrients are released and oxygen is consumed. This has a detrimental effect on water quality. Sweeping up leaves and yard trimmings from impervious surfaces and properly disposing of them or composting them will prevent nutrients from being delivered to streams and rivers via the storm drain system.

If you live adjacent to streams, wetlands, or other water bodies, allow thick vegetation to establish on the streambanks. This buffer acts to slow runoff and remove some pollutants before they enter the stream.

Photos by S. Donaldson

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