



# JEFFCO H<sub>2</sub>O NEWS

ISSUE 33 - FALL - WINTER 2020

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## The Gift That Keeps On Giving



Unlike the Jelly of the Month Club mentioned in the classic movie *Christmas Vacation*, a tree really is a gift that keeps on giving. Besides adding to property value, being visually appealing, and improving mental and physical health, trees bring additional value to our lives. Trees that are located within urban settings are part of what is called the urban canopy. Periodically, the US Department of Agriculture Forestry Service evaluates the effects of urbanization and the extent of the urban canopy in the US. The agency projects that more than 95 million acres of land (about the size of Montana) will be urbanized by 2060, bringing the total urbanized area to 163 million acres. Replacing forest and agricultural lands with urbanization affects the environment and human health in many ways, including creating [heat islands](#), reducing [carbon sequestering](#) capacity, and increasing stormwater runoff from paved and other impermeable surfaces. Many cities, including those in [Jefferson County](#), have recognized the value of preserving and increasing the number of trees within their borders. The Forestry Service estimates that about 5.5 billion trees currently make up our nation's urban canopy. Their [contributions](#) to society bring a value estimated at \$18 billion by improving air quality and improving energy efficiency in buildings. Fall is an excellent time to plant a tree! Adding a tree, or several, to your yard will bring many benefits, including managing [stormwater](#) on your property. Be sure to select a tree that is the right size for the location you choose and the right variety for your landscape conditions.

## What's Happening

*Be sure to check with the organizer to make sure that the date, time and format have not changed due to COVID-19 precautions.*

**National Neighborhood Night Out - October 6** - Due to COVID-19 precautions, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office has cancelled this yearly event normally hosted in Sylvan Springs and Center Point. Check with your local municipality or police office to determine if an event will be held in your city.

**National Prescription Drug Take Back Day - October 26** - Safely dispose of unwanted prescription drugs - never flush! Contact the Jefferson County [Sheriff's Office](#) or your local municipality for information about collections sites. For year round safe disposal options, click [HERE](#).

**2021 Stormwater Calendar** - They're here! The 2021 Stormwater Calendar is jam packed with helpful tips on making the most of stormwater on your property, ways to prevent water pollution, a look at Jefferson County's watersheds, and lots of ways to get involved to protect water quality. Stop by the lobby in B200 of the Courthouse to pick up your calendar! Or you can download a copy of the calendar [HERE](#).

**Christmas Tree Recycling - Birmingham Zoo - December 26 - January 9** - Give your natural tree a new use by recycling it! Trees are chipped, shredded and mulched. The mulch is used throughout the [Zoo](#) to control stormwater runoff and soil erosion. Be sure to call 205-879-0409 to verify dates and times.

## Change of Season



Fall brings many changes to residential landscapes, including the end of the growing season for many plants. That means that there are some preparations to make for the coming cooler weather. Rake [fallen leaves](#) and use them as a mulch in plant beds or add to a compost pile. Alternatively, you could run over fallen leaves with a mulching lawn mower to add the leaf matter to your lawn. If you do not plan to use fallen leaves as mulch, do purchase commercial mulch and add to garden beds to prevent winter damage to plants and add organic material to the soil. To prepare your lawn for the cooler days ahead, cut the grass one more time. If your grass is a [warm season species](#), it will go dormant in the cold months and therefore will not benefit from fertilizing at this time. However, be ready to get a jump start on controlling spring weeds by applying a granular pre-emergent weed control product in February. Be sure to follow the label directions on how to apply. Survey garden beds, and remove any dead plants. [Plant](#) now for fall and winter color. [Prune](#) any trees or shrubs to remove dead limbs. Postpone shaping or other pruning until the plants are dormant in December or January. Grass clippings and plant waste can be added to a compost pile. Be sure to keep all yard debris out of the storm drain and gutter system. If you have bulbs in the landscape or would like to add some for the next growing season, they should be divided or planted in late fall and winter. New trees are best planted in the fall to allow the root system to establish during cooler months. This also is the best time to [plan](#) for any changes you want to make to your landscape.

## Cease the Grease



It's ugly, stinky, greasy, and disgusting no matter how you look at it. On top of that, it's filled with bacteria and other pathogens. What are we talking about? Clogged sanitary sewer pipes caused by cooking oil and grease in the system. While this is a problem year round, it is especially important to remember as the holidays approach. More meals with friends and family mean more used cooking oil and grease is generated. Rinsing cooking oil and grease down the kitchen sink drain is not an acceptable way to get rid of it. Running hot water, squirting liquid dishwashing detergent, or running the disposal do not solve the problem. Oil and grease cool and harden on the walls of the underground sanitary sewer system pipes, building up until it eventually blocks the pipes, causing sewage to back up into your home or overflow outside. Calling a plumber to fix the problem in your home isn't cheap; it also isn't cheap for Jefferson County to unclog a sewer line outside. There is a way to prevent this problem from happening to you. Never pour or rinse out cooking oil or grease in your sink. First pour cooking oil into a container. You can get a steady supply of free containers from one of Jefferson County's cooking oil and grease [recycling locations](#) or use any non-glass container with a lid that you have at home. After pouring into the container, if there is any oil or grease left in the pan or on plates, use a paper towel to wipe away as much remaining oil or grease as possible and throw paper towel into the trash. Allow the container to cool, put the lid on tight and drop it off at one of Jefferson County's oil and grease recycling locations. Alternatively, containers can be sealed and placed in the trash for proper disposal.

## The Pervasiveness of Plastic



COVID-19 has affected a lot of things about how we have lived our lives over the past 7 months. One not so good result is the increase in the amount of plastic drink bottles that are turning up in Jefferson County waterways. While there's no way to be sure why this is happening, one possibility is the fact that more people have been ordering 'to go' meals rather than eating in restaurants. This of course creates more plastic food and drink container waste. While we would like to think that most plastic waste is recycled or properly disposed, much of the world's plastic waste is either littered or illegally dumped. Even if plastic waste falls out of a too full trash can, no matter how it wound up on the ground, the end result is the same: stormwater picks up and carries anything on the ground into the nearest waterway, and much of that eventually finds its way to the ocean. It is estimated that nearly 9 million tons of plastic washed into the ocean in 2019. Beyond being unsightly in Jefferson County's beautiful creeks and rivers, plastics don't just decompose into harmless materials. You've probably heard about the ocean [trash patches](#). Much of the plastic in these patches breaks up into tiny pieces. What you may not have heard is that this same process is occurring in creeks and rivers - our drinking water sources - even before the [plastic waste](#) reaches the ocean. Both fresh and saltwater fish and birds often mistake these plastic bits for food, eat them, and just that easily, plastics enter our 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 (maybe stop buying single use items) and more responsible with disposal (always recycle when appropriate, and PLEASE never litter or illegally dump your trash).

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