



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

ISSUE 32 - SUMMER/FALL 2020

To Turf or Not to Turf | What's Happening | The Intrepid Gardener | Besties | Home Sweeter Home

## To Turf or Not to Turf



And that is the question! We love our lawns. They provide a green backdrop for the rest of our landscaping not to mention a readily available space for an impromptu ball game. While there are many good reasons for maintaining a beautiful turf lawn, there are also some reasons to diversify your landscape. First, here are some reasons why [lawns are great](#): Any green space helps reduce the urban [heat island effect](#), lowering the temperature of an area. Lawns absorb rainwater, reduce runoff, help restore groundwater and reduce urban flooding. Since lawns are plants, they help improve air quality and improve the soil. All that said, here are some reasons to diversify: Lawns are the largest irrigated crop in the US, occupying more than 40 million acres of land and consuming as much as 19.5 trillion gallons of water per year. Lawns create a monoculture, meaning that there is no plant diversity in large areas of land. Plant diversity also means diversity in bugs, birds and other wildlife which bring many [benefits](#) to an area. Luckily there are some easy things that can be done in your yard to reduce its impact on natural resources and provide you with the best of both worlds. Simply doing a little research on turf grass varieties, choosing the type that is best suited for your needs and landscape conditions, and implementing more efficient irrigation practices can go a long way toward reducing the use of yard chemicals and conserving water. With increasingly unpredictable weather, more frequent lingering droughts and declining groundwater reserves, many homeowners are exploring other options including the use of [alternative landscaping techniques](#) to conserve resources. Creating an alternative landscape involves scaling back the turf in your yard to further reduce water consumption, runoff, and yard chemical use. Here are a few ideas to begin a transition from all turf to an alternative landscape: **1.** Start with a plan! First identify turf areas that serve a purpose, such as recreation. These areas will remain unchanged. **2.** Identify the hardest to maintain turf areas as the first candidates for removal. Areas of turf that are the least functional, or do not serve a specific purpose, are next on the removal list. **3.** As time and money allow, replace the turf areas you have identified with easy care groundcover, [water efficient plants](#), or consider planting trees to create natural areas that will expand as the tree canopy grows. Over time, your yard can become both a fun and safe recreation center as well as a low impact and sustainable retreat.

## What's Happening

**Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Series - Birmingham Botanical Gardens** - This series of free informational seminars continues through October. The seminars are currently being offered remotely via Zoom. Visit [bbgardens.org](#) for more information and to obtain a seminar access code.

**Household Hazardous Waste Day - July 25** - Recently clean out the garage and found paint from the 90s? Bring paint, cleaners, solvents, automotive fluids, yard chemicals, electronics, and much more to one of 3 locations. Click [HERE](#) for more information, or call 325-8741.

**Electronic Collection Day - August 8** - Conveniently drop off your unwanted electronics for proper disposal. More information is [HERE](#).

**Farmers Markets - Multiple Locations** - Do you know where your vegetables have been? Shopping at a farmers market is a great way to purchase fresh, wholesome produce while supporting the local economy. Many [farmers markets](#) throughout Jefferson County are open with new operating protocols to keep everyone safe. Call your chosen location first to confirm times of operation.

## The Intrepid Gardener

Last time, Mr. T shared with us some of his successes as well as some lessons learned. This time, we are going back to Hana's yard to see what she has been doing. Her last two articles discussed her strategies for improving the soil and drainage on her property to put in place the foundational elements of a great landscape that includes native plants and water features. In this issue, Hana is focusing on her continuing water drainage challenges and the steps she has taken to remediate and utilize this element in her yard. Read more [HERE](#).

## Besties



Just like people, plants have besties too! Some plants just do better when they are around certain other plants, and the practice called [companion planting](#) has been known and utilized for centuries. As early as ancient Roman times, crops were planted in proximity to one another because of the benefits it brought. Native Americans planted corn, beans and squash together so that the 'three sisters' could thrive. Sometimes the [relationship](#) means that one plant provides shade that the other plant needs, or provides a stalk for its companion to climb. Some plants like potatoes draw lots of nitrogen from the soil while some like beans fix nitrogen into the soil, which makes these two great companions. The same applies to pairing plants like tomatoes and cucumbers which uptake large amounts of nutrients with beets and carrots which do not. Companions can help prevent pest problems by repelling or confusing pests with odor or color, or attracting natural predators such as birds and beneficial insects. Planting marigolds in a vegetable garden is an example of a plant that helps protect its neighbors by repelling pests. Planting flowers, herbs, and vegetables in close proximity also increases the biodiversity in the garden. Biodiversity helps to support nature's own systems to help plants stay strong and healthy. This may also help reduce the need for yard chemicals such as pesticides which is especially desirable in your home vegetable garden.

## Home Sweeter Home



For many of us who recently spent long periods of time at home, we couldn't help but notice those projects we've been putting off. If you haven't already tackled some of those, maybe the long warm days of summer will get you in the mood to get your living space in shape. If it's been a few years since you've paid attention to your home's exterior, it could probably use some attention and care. Take some time to check and clean out gutters to make sure that they are flowing freely. This is also an ideal time to consider diverting the [downspouts](#) so that rain can soak into your yard (make sure the water will drain away from the foundation), or installing a few rain barrels to capture rain for later use. Both of these options are excellent ways to [manage stormwater](#) on your property while saving a little money on landscape irrigation. If you plan to pressure wash the exterior of home, deck or paved areas, it's important to prevent the wash water from entering the storm drain system, since it will pick up and carry dirt, oil, and yard chemicals to the nearest waterway. If you plan to use cleaning products outside, make sure to choose the least toxic options. If you are painting the exterior of your home, choose water based paint whenever possible. Remember to clean brushes, rollers and other tools inside in the sink, not in the driveway or street, to prevent paint from washing into the storm drain system. If you are using an oil based paint or stain, properly store or dispose of them at a [household hazardous waste](#) event. When patching and sealing driveways, make sure bags of cement are kept covered and apply sealants only when rain is not in the forecast. Just a reminder - also consider using the least [toxic products](#) inside your home to protect your family's health. You probably have all the [ingredients](#) you need right in your pantry!