



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

ISSUE 30 - WINTER/SPRING 2020

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## The Dirt On Dirt



Spring is just around the corner, and with it comes the start of the growing season. There is one often overlooked factor that should be on your radar. Paying attention to the soil in your landscape can make or break your gardening efforts. Unfortunately for many of us living in Jefferson County, our clay soil provides an extra challenge. Amending soil can help transform clay soil into a more plant friendly composition, increase the soil's ability to retain moisture, prevent weeds from growing, and reduce stormwater runoff. One of the best remedies for amending clay soil is to add organic matter. According to the EPA, for every 1% that you increase your soil's organic content, you also increase its water absorption capacity by 16,000 gallons of water per acre, down to one foot deep. So where exactly can you get organic matter and how do you use it? Organic matter can be purchased, or obtained for free from yard debris, fallen leaves, or a home compost pile. Adding and mixing this organic material into clay soil over a period of time can dramatically improve the soil's ability to support your gardening efforts. Decomposing organic material contains a variety of nutrients that plants need to grow. Organisms such as earthworms, beetles and snails munch away on these organic materials and

break them down into smaller bits. Microscopic bacteria and fungi go to work on the leftovers and handle the chemical end of decomposing. Even though it sounds icky, the result is a rich topsoil-like blend of exactly what most plants need to thrive. One way to create a handy source of ready to use organic material is to create a [compost pile](#) at home. This is not difficult, does not require much space and, depending upon weather conditions, can yield usable compost in as little as a few weeks. The beneficial organisms that compost introduces to your soil help perpetuate the benefits of composting by continuing the cycle of organic decomposition. [HERE](#) is an article from Clemson University that discusses how to use organic material to improve soil in order to establish a successful gardening foundation.

## What's Happening

**MLK Day of Service - January 20** - Volunteer at one of 4 locations to pick up litter from along roads. [Learn](#) how you can participate and make a difference!

**Bi-Annual Valley Creek Cleanup - March 16** - The Valley Creek Cleanup is celebrating 10 Years of working to protect Valley Creek! Please join us at one of the 4 Valley Creek Cleanup locations. Click [HERE](#) or call 325-8741 to learn more!

**Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event - April 25** - Three drop off locations (Bessemer, Gardendale, Irondale) will be open to all residents of Jefferson County. More information and a list of what to bring for FREE is coming [HERE](#) soon.

**Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Series - Birmingham Botanical Gardens** - Returning for its 9th year, this series of 14 FREE informational seminars will start again in March and run through September. Topics ranging from basic information to expert advice will be offered. Information is coming [HERE](#) soon.

**Day Hike at Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve - February 8** - Southeastern Outing and Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve are organizing a moderate 4 mile hike through the trails and history of Ruffner Mountain. For more information about this FREE event, visit [Southeastern Outings](#).

## Cutting Corners



If you are like most people, there's a good chance that your lawn runs to all four corners of your yard. While there's certainly nothing wrong with that, turf grass is not always the best choice for maximizing opportunities for rain to soak into your yard. Most turf grass has shallow roots which are not very efficient at quickly absorbing water and reducing stormwater runoff. Often soil is compacted in heavily used areas of the yard, greatly reducing the ability for stormwater to infiltrate rather than run off. One way to increase the opportunities for your yard to absorb rainwater while also creating more visual interest is to install a [pocket garden](#) or two in the corners of your yard. The idea for incorporating a pocket garden into the landscape is not new. These small unexpected oases in the landscape can help you showcase your unique style in the midst of what otherwise would be grass. This alternative to turf will provide greater opportunity for filtering out pollutants and reducing the amount of stormwater that leaves your yard. It's even more beneficial if you decide to use [native plants](#). Native plants have evolved over thousands of years to be best adapted to thrive in our growing conditions, and generally are healthier, stronger, and establish more quickly than non-natives. Choosing to use

native plants can bring [extra benefits](#) to your yard such as attracting bees, butterflies and other pollinators as well as providing food and shelter for wildlife. Whatever type of plants you select, be sure to consider how much sunlight and water your choices will need, and make sure to place the right plant in the right spot. The 2020 [Stormwater Calendar](#) has an entire year full of stormwater friendly ideas that you can consider adding to your landscape.

## Spring Cleaning



There's just something about spring that seems to make us want to freshen up our living spaces. Sometimes that involves doing some exterior cleaning and maintenance which can include yard cleanup, pressure washing, cleaning out the gutters, and refreshing garden beds. Since some of these tasks involve using water, be mindful how much you are using and where it is flowing. Rake any remaining leaves from landscape beds, trim back any plants that require attention, clean leaves and debris from any corners where they have collected over the winter, pick up any sticks or debris from the lawn. Clean out and perform any needed maintenance on gutters. All of this yard debris can be used to start or add to a compost pile. Consider diverting downspouts into a grassy or natural area in your yard to reduce runoff from your property. If you plan to pressure wash, be sure to use only non-toxic cleaning products and redirect used water into a grassy or natural area on your property to allow it to soak into the ground rather than run off. Adjust any automatic timers you have set to turn on sprinklers, and make sure the heads are properly aimed and calibrated. Check your vehicle for any drips or leaks that might fall on the driveway or street. A first line of defense is to place a

catch pan or oil absorbent pad under the car until you can get it fixed. If oil or other fluid has dripped on the driveway, use cat litter or oil absorbent granules on the spill, allow the spill to soak up, sweep the absorbent into a dust pan and put into the trash. Never hose down the driveway, since that can easily carry pollutants directly into the nearest storm drain. Spring is a perfect time to give the lawnmower a thorough cleaning and tune-up, and to sharpen blades. While you are at it, you may want to take a look at other yard equipment to make sure everything is in top shape. If you clean out the garage or under the sink, you may wind up with some items that need special handling for proper disposal. You can bring any vehicle fluids, oils, paints, solvents, old batteries, unwanted electronics, appliances or other hard to dispose of materials, to the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event on Saturday April 25.

## Please RID



If you drive along any of Jefferson County's roads, chances are you will see some truly beautiful scenery. Unfortunately, there also is a good chance that you will encounter an illegal dump site. Illegal dumping occurs when people do not properly discard household trash, yard debris, household items, construction waste, and other materials. Instead, they illegally put it where it does not belong. It is against the law to improperly dispose of unwanted materials because they have the potential to cause harm to people, communities and the environment. A fine of \$500 plus court costs can be levied against the perpetrators for each violation. In some cases, the perpetrators can be sentenced to serve jail time. Illegal dumping usually happens in remote areas or late at night to avoid detection. Often, people dump household or business waste rather than properly disposing of it to avoid the fees required for proper disposal. Unfortunately, that thinking costs everyone else. There are many health risks to the [community](#) caused by illegal dumping, including providing a breeding ground for mosquitos, rats and snakes. Statistics show that illegal dumping also decreases property values and increases crime. As a resident of [Jefferson County](#), your tax dollars pay for County

staff to investigate, clean up and properly dispose of materials from these many illegal dump sites. This also means that these tax dollars can't be used for other projects that would actually improve our roads and communities. Sadly, this cycle of illegal dumping is very difficult to stop, but you have the power to help if you RID: Report Illegal Dumping! If you see something, call 205.582.6555 to RID! Your confidential call can help end this very expensive problem.