Save the Date
65th Annual Meeting & Banquet
Tentative Date: Monday, November 23rd

Protect Your Soil & Improve Water Quality

Did you know that you can improve the health of your soil and the quality of the lakes and streams in your watershed or neighborhood, by adding cover crops to your urban and suburban autumn lawn care regimen? At the end of the summer growing season, when you are ready to take a breather from gardening and yard work, but your soil is not ready to rest. One final effort to plant a cover crop in the fall can make a huge difference over the winter toward improving your soil and helping to reduce soil erosion, stormwater runoff, and non-point source pollution entering our streams and rivers in the spring.

Cover crops, also known as green manures, are an excellent tool for vegetable gardeners, especially when manure and compost are not available. Even small gardens will benefit from the use of cover crops. The tilling, weeding, harvesting, and foot traffic of most home gardens tends to destroy the structure of the soil. Planting cover crops is an easy way to revitalize the soil and promote subsequent plant growth. Cover crops are planted in vacant space and instead of being harvested, are worked into the soil after they mature. They provide a number of advantages to the otherwise unhealthy condition of bare soil during your garden's off-season.

Cover crops help to retain the soil, lessen erosion, and decrease the impact of rainfall on the garden by slowing the runoff of the rainwater. They also reduce soil compaction, suppress weed growth, and reduce the leaching out of nutrients from the soil. Cover crop top growth adds organic matter when it combines with the soil. The root system also provides organic matter and opens passageways that help improve air and water movement in the soil. Scientific studies have shown that cover crops actually drill down into the soil, some as much as six feet. When they decompose, the next crop planted will follow the rooting network laid out by the cover crop.

Darke SWCD has two cover crop blends available for use in your home garden. We sell our Fall mix, an oat -radish blend and our Winter Mix, a cereal rye-radish blend. Both mixes can be purchased in a 1 pound bag for only $3.00. If you are interested in purchasing either blend, give us a call at 937.548.1715 ext. 3. Supplies are limited!

Darke SWCD continues to adjust to the changes caused by COVID-19. At this time, Darke SWCD and NRCS offices remain closed to the public. To purchase items or speak with a technician, contact the Darke SWCD office at 937.548.1715 ext. 3. All staff are working normally scheduled hours and are conducting field visits. Thank you for your patience during this unprecedented time.

The Greenville Storm

Summer 2020

Keep Grass Clippings Out of the Street

Recent summer rains have many Greenville residents mowing their lawn more often this year. As a reminder, please don't blow your grass clippings in the street. Any grass clippings blown into the street eventually enter the storm drain, which in turn flows into area streams and rivers. The storm water drainage system does not flow to the wastewater treatment plant like the sanitary sewer.

Here are a few tips to consider when mowing your lawn this season:

- Make certain that you aren't blowing your grass clippings into the street.
- When you start mowing your lawn, make the first few passes so that your lawnmower is blowing the clippings into the lawn and not the street.
- If you get grass clippings into the street, take a few moments to use a broom or leaf blower and blow them back in the lawn. DO NOT use a hose to wash them into the street or storm drains!
- You should always mow your lawn when the grass is dry, this helps avoid clumping.
- Set your mower cutting height to 2 or 2 ½ inches. This helps hide your clippings better and makes for a healthier lawn.
- Try to remove only one-third of the grass length per mowing. If your lawn is overgrown, mow it twice. With the first pass, cut at a higher setting. Then a day or two later, lower the mower and cut again.
- In the spring, it is ideal to mow every five days. During the dryer summer months, it may only require a cutting once every two weeks.
- To ensure a good, clean cut, sharpen your mower blades twice per year.

Grass clippings contain nitrogen and phosphorus, which lead to unwanted algae growth in our lakes, ponds and streams. This algae is harmful to our lake system, it blocks sunlight and prevents plant growth. When it dies and decays, it takes oxygen away from fish, creating a hypoxic or "dead zone" in

This newsletter is for residents of the city of Greenville dedicated to reducing storm water impacts on Greenville Creek.

Grass Clippings Cont'd

the water.

Here are a few issues created by the disposal of grass clippings or leaves in the street:

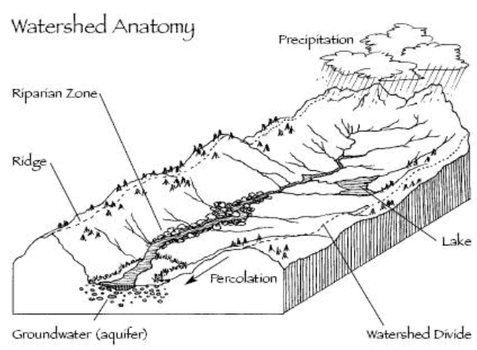
- Flooding – blockage of a system creates flooding that could result in property damage.
- Water Quality – leads to an increase in nutrients which can cause algae growth with the potential of killing fish and other aquatic life.
- Safety – potential reduction of traction between vehicles and the roadway.

Keeping leaves and grass clippings out of the streets can have a significant impact on our area waters. By doing this, you are helping to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus entering our streams. Leaving your grass clippings on the lawn can reduce your annual fertilizer needs and costs, while reducing water pollution.

Why do we care about stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff can cause a variety of problems for both humans and the environment. Flooding causes damage to public and private property. Sediment eroded from streambanks can clog waterways, fill lakes and reservoirs, and kill fish and aquatic life. Contaminated runoff can pollute streams, lakes, reservoirs and can degrade drinking water. Plus, costs for water and wastewater treatment increase.

What is a Watershed?



A watershed is an area of land that drains to a particular point along a stream. Whenever the City of Greenville receives precipitation, the majority of the water running off the streets, driveways, and lawns enter Greenville Creek, which is a tributary to the Stillwater River.

Within each watershed there are complex systems of urban, rural, agricultural, and natural areas that have a variety of positive and negative impacts on water quality. It is important that as a community, we realize the impacts and how to reduce the negative effects to the environment.

Many urban residents have been implementing practices like rain barrels, rain gardens, green spaces, and a variety of conservation practices to reduce the negative impacts on water quality. Conservation practices like no-till, nutrient management, cover crops, and grass filtering areas have been implemented into the agricultural areas to help improve water quality. As a community, we need to remember that "We All Live Down Stream".

What are the 4R's of Lawn Fertilization?

You may not think that the fertilizer you spread on your lawn is a source of water pollution. However, excess nutrients applied to neighborhood lawns are carried with storm water runoff to local streams and rivers. The cumulative effects of this runoff has created a large scale water pollution problem. We are all responsible to keep our local lakes, rivers and groundwater clean. By following the 4R's we can reduce the potential for pollution from our lawns:

- ***Right Type***: Soil testing should be done to determine fertilizer needs for your yard. Soil testing should be done during the late fall once every three years. Unless your soil test shows a need for phosphorus, choose a slow release phosphorus-free fertilizer.
- ***Right Rate***: Refer to your soil test results for the appropriate fertilizer application rate. Do not exceed the recommended rate and never apply more than 1.5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- ***Right Time***: The best time of the year to apply fertilizer to your lawn is Autumn since cool season grasses are actively growing.

Conservation Begins in Your Backyard

- Healthy soil is the foundation of a good lawn.
- For mature grass, always choose a fertilizer that is phosphorus-free, unless a soil test shows a need for this nutrient.
- The best time to feed is in the spring and fall when the grass is actively growing.
- Use a drop spreader or rotary spreader with a side guard to keep fertilizer on the grass
- Set your mower at its highest setting (taller grass is stronger grass).
- Use a mulching mower, so that grass clippings can be returned to the soil where they will break down and add nutrients and organic matter to the soil.
- In the fall, mulch leaves using your lawn mower.
- Sweep leaves, grass clippings and fertilizer that land on driveways and sidewalks back on to the grass.

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