

# Franklin Soil and Water Backyard Conservation Update

## October 6, 2014

### Lawn Care & Soil Testing

Our first lawn care and soil testing workshop was a great success with over 40 attendees. We would like to extend a big “Thank You” to Pam Sherratt of OSU and Steve Baker of USDA NRCS for great presentations! You can find their presentations and Pam’s handout on our web site under [Backyard Conservation/ Lawn Care & Soil Testing](#).

Remember that the first step in proper fertilizer use is to know what is needed. [OSU Extension’s Franklin County office](#) offers low-cost soil testing. The office is located at 2105 S. Hamilton Road, Suite 100, Columbus, Ohio 43232-4145. Phone: (614) 866-6900.

### Leaves, Leaves, Leaves

Yes, I have received some funny looks from passing motorists as I rake my gutter. And no, I am not a glutton for yard work. After I mow, I sweep stray grass clippings off of the sidewalk and back onto the lawn. In the fall, this extends to picking up leaves that have fallen on the sidewalk and street. Leaves left lying in street gutters impede the flow of rainwater to the nearest storm drain, creating puddles where mosquitoes can breed. When the leaves are blown by wind or carried by rainwater to the storm drain, they clog the catch basin and form an impenetrable mat on the grate. This causes street flooding and the extra expense of calling out municipal or township employees to clean it. When leaves travel through the stormwater system to the nearest stream, they contribute to oxygen depletion as they decompose.

What should you do with leaves? If your community has curbside collection with vacuum trucks, keep the leaf piles out of the street. If you have curbside yard waste recycling, put leaves in trash cans marked “yard waste” or in the paper bags sold for this purpose at grocery, hardware and home-improvement stores. Plastic bags will not be picked up. Leaves can be shredded and spread on garden beds or mixed with green, high-nitrogen materials in composting. If you save your leaves to cover kitchen scraps or to use in the spring, put them in plastic bags in the garage. Do not just rake them into piles to use later. This dry, fluffy material makes great nesting for rats.

### Additional Fall Composting Tips

- \* Remove weeds and debris from gardens to eliminate overwintering sites for insects, and gently till or turn soil to expose them. Only disease-free plants should be composted in a home-composting bin.

- \* A healthy compost pile consists of two-thirds carbon (brown) materials and one-third nitrogen (green) materials. Most of us have plenty of green, nitrogen-rich materials throughout the year for our compost, but struggle with finding the carbon-based materials. Finally, autumn offers plenty of leaves! Deciduous leaves are the best—evergreen leaves and needles are compostable but decompose slowly. Shredding leaves will provide more surface area for bacteria and microbes to work quickly.

- \* Your leaves can be composted with the addition of nitrogen. Freshly cut grass clippings are ideal “activators,” and can be added in thin layers to prevent matting. If you have too many leaves but not

enough nitrogen, consider composting them with a layer of soil between each foot of leaves. In about 4-6 months, you'll have leaf compost that's a great amendment and conditioner (but somewhat lower in nutrients).

## Donate Your Used Electronics to Goodwill Columbus

The Franklin County Green Team and Goodwill Columbus are partnering to collect e-waste on Saturday October 11 from 9:00 a.m. until noon at [Huntington Park, 330 Huntington Park Ln., Columbus, OH 43215](#). Help keep e-waste out of our local landfill by donating your used electronics to Goodwill Columbus. Not only do you help protect the environment, but you'll also assist us in providing services to those in our community with developmental disabilities. [Here is a list of accepted items \(and two that are not\)](#). Drop off your electronics and receive a goody bag from our sponsors with coupons from Donato's Pizza and the Columbus Clippers while supplies last. Franklin County employees volunteer to work alongside the Goodwill staff during the event, so keep us busy by clearing your basement of those old electronics!

## Rain Barrel Opportunity

The GreenSpot Rain Barrel Program workshops are finished for the 2014 season and the online program closes Friday October 31. There is an opportunity for past participants to purchase a second barrel while our overstock lasts. As you might imagine, rain barrels take up a lot of real estate in our office and since the program is over for the year, we want our floor space back!

2014 participants will receive an e-mail soon from [khilson@franklinswcd.org](mailto:khilson@franklinswcd.org). Reply to this e-mail to reserve your second barrel and you will receive confirmation from Kristin. You can then come to our office on any Friday between 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to pick up your second barrel. You can pay the \$55 with cash, check or credit card.

If you participated in the GreenSpot Rain Barrel program in previous years, please call the office at (614) 486-9613 before coming in Fridays 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We consider this an education program and want to ensure that all rain barrel purchasers have participated in our stormwater education program online or through a workshop. Questions? Call the office at (614) 486-9613. Also, Kristin plans a couple of Saturday pick-up times for those who can't get here during the week—stay tuned!

## Another Reason Not to Feed Stray Cats

One of the great things about our staff is the diversity of background. My colleague Kimberly Eakins has an MPH in public health and has a different perspective on some issues. Since the problem of rats in Clintonville was brought to my attention last year, I have become more aware of the intersections of natural resources and public health, and while I, and I'm sure many of you, have read about the predation of songbirds by outdoor housecats and feral cats, Kimmie has brought another issue to my attention:

"I know that they look cute and cuddly, but there is more to these felines than meets the eye! Stray cats can not only be destructive, but they carry diseases that are both harmful to your house cats (i.e. Feline Panleukopenia virus (FPV), also commonly referred to as feline distemper) and to humans (i.e. rabies). The stray cat populations have been on the rise over the past few years and with a female cat being able to become impregnated at the age of only 5 months, it's no wonder. Please do your

part to help reduce the stray and feral cat populations in your area! Below are educational links with further detail about these cat populations:"

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-behavior/stray-and-feral-cats>

[http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral\\_cats/qa/feral\\_cat\\_FAQs.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/qa/feral_cat_FAQs.html)

[http://poststar.com/news/local/stray-cats-present-risks/article\\_c3ed9dec-7953-11e1-817b-0019bb2963f4.html](http://poststar.com/news/local/stray-cats-present-risks/article_c3ed9dec-7953-11e1-817b-0019bb2963f4.html)

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/17/feral-cats-colonies-rabies-risk/2665359/>

## Speaking of Wildlife . . .

As the weather cools, many animals decide our houses make great homes for them as well. The City of Upper Arlington has [a useful page on their web site](#) called DIY Wildlife Control. Before you call in the experts, you might want to read what you can do to prevent the problem.

## Are You on the Board of Your Homeowners' Association?

We are partnering with the watershed group Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed (FLOW) to provide a free stormwater pond management workshop on Thursday, October 23 at 6:30 p.m. in our office, 1404 Goodale Boulevard, Suite 100, Columbus 43212. One group we would like to reach with this information is homeowners' associations because they often must manage a stormwater pond without professional assistance. (Many small businesses also fall into this category, and you're invited too!) [Read more about the workshop on our web site](#). Also, if your stormwater pond is in the Olentangy Watershed, you may be eligible for cost-share assistance for the purchase of plants and design for retrofitting. You can register by mailing the registration form (found on the web page above) or e-mailing Kyle Wilson at [kwilson@franklinswcd.org](mailto:kwilson@franklinswcd.org).

## Start Planning for an Aesthetically Pleasing & Functional Stream Buffer

Now that we are putting our gardens to bed and tidying our yards for the cold season, many of us also start planning for next year. If your property has a stream running through it, think about how you can keep a lovely landscape and protect your streambank from erosion at the same time. Both of our watershed coordinators asked me to mention buffers in this BC Update, so I better mention them! Stream buffers differ from mowed turf grass by providing a living network of roots to provide greater stability for streambanks. They also help prevent landscaping fertilizers and pesticides from washing into streams.

Kurt is working with the City of Reynoldsburg to design a model buffer that will demonstrate that stream buffers can protect your property without looking wild and weedy. You can continue the look of your landscaped yard with judicious plantings of native grasses, flowers, shrubs and trees, which in turn protect your property from the erosive forces of excessive runoff from upstream. I'll let you know when the Reynoldsburg project is completed so you can take a look.

Ryan is developing a subwatershed planning protocol that uses computer mapping tools to locate the best places to install conservation practices to protect water quality. And guess what he's thinking

about? Yep, buffers. Low cost, high impact. Ryan suggested landowners may want to visit this [OSU Extension Ohio Watershed Network page](#) for good information about buffers.

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Hope you've enjoyed this Backyard Conservation Update. Feel free to contact me with topics that interest you or questions you may have about conservation in Franklin County. You can also contact us through Facebook ([www.facebook.com/franklinsoilandwater](http://www.facebook.com/franklinsoilandwater)) or Twitter (@franklinswcd).

To be added or removed from this list, please contact Mary Ann Brouillette at (614) 486-9613 x 113 or [mbrouillette@franklinswcd.org](mailto:mbrouillette@franklinswcd.org), or just reply to this e-mail.

Happy autumn!  
Mary Ann

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Communications Specialist

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