



JEFFCO H₂O NEWS

ISSUE 17 - FALL/WINTER 2016

It's Just a Drop | Breathe Easy | What's Happening? | Waste Not | Awesome Autumn

It's Just a Drop



You notice a drop of oil on the driveway under your car. Not a big deal, right? Probably not a good reason to spend the time and money to take the car into the service shop. But then there is another drop tomorrow, and another the next day. At the end of the week, it still doesn't seem to be anything to worry about, just seven drops. That is, until you factor in the other 600,000 vehicles registered in Jefferson County. If just 10% of these cars drip one drop of oil per day, that winds up being more than 3 quarts of oil dripping on the ground every day, or more than 5 gallons by the end of the week. That 5 gallons of oil can pollute 5 MILLION gallons of water if it is washed by rain into a creek or stream. To put that into perspective, an Olympic sized pool contains just 660,000 gallons of water. So yes, one drop does matter. A first line of defense is to place a catch pan or oil absorbent pad under the car until you can get the leak fixed. If oil or other fluid is on the driveway, use a dry material such as cat litter or oil absorbent granules that can be purchased at most big box and auto care centers. This can be sprinkled on the spill, allowed to soak up the oil

or fluid, swept up, and put into the trash. Never hose down the driveway, since that can easily carry pollutants directly into the nearest storm drain!

Breathe Easy



What do cleaner air and reduced crime have in common? TREES! Trees can really add to the overall aesthetics of a landscape, and sometimes just being in their midst can make you feel good. For the first time ever, a [national study](#) conducted in 2014 by the US Forest Service has quantified just how valuable trees are to human health in the US. The study calculated that trees save more than 850 human lives each year and prevent 670,000 incidences of acute respiratory symptoms by removing pollutants from the air. Trees act as [natural pollution filters](#) by absorbing carbon dioxide through the stomata on their leaf surfaces. One tree can remove 48 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release 260 pounds of oxygen back into the atmosphere each year through its photosynthesis process. Trees are able to absorb both gaseous and particulate pollutants. Particulate pollution, which comes from [sources](#) such as manufacturing and vehicles, can fall from the air and settle on land and water. Both particulate and gaseous pollutants can combine with air and water in the atmosphere to create [acid rain](#). Particulate pollution that falls to the ground can be carried by rain into local waterways. Trees also help keep pollution on the ground from entering local waterways by taking in large quantities of stormwater, thereby preventing it from becoming runoff. Fall is the perfect time to plant a tree because with cooler weather comes less heat stress on the plant, and the season coincides with the tree's dormant cycle, allowing it to form a strong root structure before winter. Studies also show that planting trees and creating green spaces in communities have a calming effect which can reduce aggressive behavior and lower crime rates. Closer to home, keeping your yard tidy can [help reduce crime](#) by letting would-be criminals know that you and your neighbors are paying attention and care about your community. So consider planting a tree or two this fall to enjoy the many benefits they will provide in the years to come.

What's Happening?

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day - October 22 - Safely dispose of old or unwanted prescription drugs at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Center Point Substation (2651 Center Point Road 35215) or McCalla Substation (5725 Eastern Valley Road 35111) from 10am until 2pm. Visit [the DEA website](#) for more information.

Cease the Grease - Remember that Jefferson County's free household cooking oil and grease recycling program offers clean plastic jugs and recycling kiosks conveniently placed at [20 locations](#) throughout Jefferson County.

Birmingham Botanical Gardens Fall Plant Sale - October 22-23 - This is a great opportunity to purchase native plants and trees just in time for the optimum planting season! Visit [bbgardens.org](#) for more information.

They're Here!!! Stop by the Storm Water Management Department, Room B-210, to pick up your FREE 2017 Stormwater Calendar!

Waste Not



When you think of Thanksgiving, you probably imagine a huge, delicious meal enjoyed with friends and family. Many holidays and celebrations seem to revolve around food. After all, food is one of the basic necessities for human life. But in spite of its importance to our very survival, Americans throw away about 133 BILLION pounds of food - worth \$162 billion - each year. For the average American family, that adds up to discarding about 20 pounds of food per person per month, which means we also are throwing away about \$2,200 per household each year. Whether you overbought at the grocery store, food wasn't properly stored, or you have some picky eaters, unwanted food usually winds up in the trash where it is transported to a landfill. [Food waste](#) is the largest component of landfills, which in turn are the largest generators of methane, a greenhouse gas. On top of that, the land, water, energy, and other requirements of growing and transporting food to the consumer where about 1/3 of it winds up in the trash is a huge waste of resources. These steps involved in getting food to your table, which include fertilizer and pesticide use, irrigation, emissions from vehicles, and power generation, can degrade water quality. So what can be done to reduce the amount of food we throw away and the natural resources we waste or harm by doing so? A good starting point is to [plan](#) what food you want to serve for the week, buy only what you know that you will use, and properly store the food until it is consumed. Search for recipes that can incorporate often wasted items such as slightly wilted vegetables (try adding to soup) or overripe fruit (whip up a smoothie) to make meals your family will enjoy while using up all the food you purchased. When serving a meal, only put what you know will be eaten on the plate. You can always come back for seconds! Carefully and properly store leftovers. For food which has no further use (some fruit and vegetable cores and peels, coffee grounds, egg shells), starting a compost pile which will yield a rich organic soil amendment for your garden is a great option. Wasting good, edible food is especially disturbing since 1 in 6 Americans live in households where access to food is not always secure. Some places of worship, food banks and shelters can accept unopened, unexpired food – ALWAYS check with the agency first before you drop off any food.

Awesome Autumn



The mornings and nights are noticeably cooler, colorful crunchy leaves are falling from the trees, and the hours of daylight are getting shorter. Kids are back in school, the vacation mode of summer is a thing of the past, and the activity calendar is full. To balance out the uptick in your to do list, the growing season is winding down which means you don't have to cut the lawn every weekend (just in time for football season)! In spite of the change of pace in the yard which coincides with the start of cooler weather, there's still a lot to do to take advantage of the gifts of autumn and get your landscape ready for spring. Sallie Lee, Urban Regional Extension Agent for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Jefferson County, has assembled some easy stormwater friendly tips to help you prepare your yard for the months to come. And as if that's not enough, Sallie has provided some calorie burning motivation to tackle these tasks. Taking the time to implement these [strategies](#) now will have your landscape off to a great start when spring rolls round again.