



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

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## Risky Business



They are called storm drains, inlets, culverts, and gutters. These openings, pipes, and ditches along roadways are built for the purpose of quickly removing rainwater from paved areas to prevent flooding. Unlike the sanitary sewer system which carries wastewater from homes and businesses to a wastewater treatment plant, storm drains carry rainwater and anything else on the ground directly to the nearest creek or stream. This water does not get treated. The thing is, storm drains are very conveniently located, and therein lies the problem. When working outside, it's normal to want to be done as quickly as possible, and that includes cleaning up after completing a project. But it is not okay to use a storm drain for the disposal of grass clippings, car wash water, vehicle fluids, or any other material associated with your project due to its potential to pollute waterways. Take the extra step to properly dispose of waste or leftover materials. Grass clippings and other yard debris can be used to start a compost pile which will create some wonderfully rich nutrients to add to your garden. Cars should be washed on a grassy or other pervious area so that wash water can soak into the ground rather than run off into the street. Or they can be taken to a commercial car wash which captures and recycles wash water. Used vehicle fluids are accepted at most locations that service cars. The bottom line is that stormwater pollution affects everyone, and it takes everyone working together to keep Jefferson County waterways clean.

## Where the Wild Things Are



Hopefully they are in your yard! Creating a sustainable landscape can provide a multitude of positive returns for your family as well as for the environment. So what exactly is involved in making your landscape sustainable? Sometimes it takes looking at your yard in a different way and identifying things you can add or change that will promote working with nature to reduce pollution and invite wildlife to your yard. Maybe that means adding native plants because they tend to require less care but attract butterflies and birds. Or maybe reducing the amount of turf grass that consumes so much of your time and resources each summer and replacing it with a beautiful low maintenance ground cover. Or perhaps adding a patio made with pavers set into sand for a wonderful new outdoor living space that is also stormwater friendly. The basic idea is to consider how each element in your landscape affects your family, local streams, wildlife, and overall quality of life. The results can be a landscape that is easier to manage, less expensive to maintain, and provides you more free time to do the other things you enjoy. Want more? Then be sure to read this great [article](#) from Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Bethany O'Rear.

## What's Happening?

**Float Your Boat - July 16** - Build a boat to race at [Turkey Creek Nature Preserve's](#) summer festival, or just enjoy the fun, food and music. Event opens at 10 am.

**Jefferson County National Neighborhood Night Out - August 2** - This family friendly event encourages partnerships between neighborhoods and the Sheriff's Office to enhance safety and crime prevention. For a list of locations and times, visit the [Sheriff's Office Facebook page](#) or call 325-1450.

**6th Annual Valley Creek Cleanup - August 20** - Help clean up [Valley Creek](#) 8:30 am - 12 noon. Multiple location roadside cleanup opportunities available. Free t-shirt and hot dog lunch for volunteers.

**Brown Bag Seminar Series** - Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 2612 Lane Park Road, Birmingham. This free [seminar](#) series continues through October.

**All Bugs Good and Bad** - Tune in to this free [webinar](#) series for information about identifying and managing pests around your home and yard.

## Beauty and the Beads



There are literally tens of thousands of beauty products on the market that claim to make your skin feel and look smoother. One type of product is skin cleanser that contains an exfoliant. The premise behind these products is that they gently remove dry surface skin cells to reveal smoother skin. Many of these products contain plastic microbeads to do the job of exfoliation. But microbeads aren't just prevalent in the beauty industry. Some toothpastes contain microbeads to polish and whiten your teeth as you brush. So what's the big deal if these products work? While the microbeads may do just what they are supposed to do, they can create some [dire consequences](#) once they go down your sink or shower drain. Plastic microbeads do not disintegrate and the municipal wastewater treatment process can't filter them from wastewater. Instead, the microbeads remain intact, making their way to local creeks, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Fish and other aquatic animals swallow the microbeads, which means that microbeads could wind up in your food supply. In December 2015, the [Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015](#) became law, banning the manufacture of rinse off cosmetics, which includes toothpastes that contain intentionally added plastic microbeads, effective July 1, 2017. The other good news is that there are many cleansing products available that contain exfoliants made from biodegradable ingredients such as nut shells, sugar, or salt. You can even [make your own](#) with similar common ingredients. As for toothpaste, read the label and choose one that does not contain microbeads, or consider alternatives such as toothpaste containing sustainable polishing agents as in baking soda.

## Vermiwhat???



It sounds gross, maybe even disgusting, but [vermicomposting](#) is the process of [using worms](#) to decompose vegetable waste in order to create a nutrient rich organic material. Worms have been doing this on their own as part of their life cycle for many millions of years, munching away on organic waste, and producing the top soil that holds nutrients vital to plant life. The short version of this process is that this nutrient rich organic material produced by worms is . . . worm poo. Politely called worm castings, this material can be harvested and used to create a wonderful container garden potting soil or can be used as a soil amendment for your garden. You can purchase worm castings at most home and garden stores or online. Better yet, for very little time and money, you can create your own [worm bin](#) and periodically harvest the castings. To protect the worms from too hot or too cold weather, vermicomposting works best when done indoors where temperatures are moderate. Contrary to a regular composting pile, vermicomposting does not produce bad odors and even can be set up in the kitchen where vegetable scraps can conveniently be added. Rather than using regular earth worms that you find outside, red wigglers are the most efficient composters and are best suited to vermicomposting. These composting champions can be purchased at some stores that carry live bait or online by the pound. When conditions in the worm bin are good with enough food and space for the colony to grow, the number of worms in the bin can double in 3-4 months and they will be creating lots of castings. [Harvesting](#) the castings is not difficult, and you will have an ongoing supply of wonderfully rich organic material.

## Insect Magnet



No, it's not your imagination! Some people really are insect magnets. According to researchers, there are [several factors](#) that may contribute to the attraction. One factor is blood type. People with type O blood attract gnats, mosquitos, and other annoying insects far more than people with other blood types. So if you are one of these unlucky folks, what to do? One of the most effective approaches is applying an [insect repellent](#) to your skin and/or clothing. Incorporating some plants into your landscape that are [natural insect repellants](#) also can help reduce the pest population around your home. While plants alone can't make your yard pest free, they can help fend off some of the aggravators. Plus, many of these plants add wonderful aroma and color to your yard. Another important strategy is tackling the potential for standing water around your home. Take a quick walk around your yard and remove any containers or other items that could hold rainwater. For features in your yard that you cannot or don't want to change, such as a pond or bird bath, adding mosquito dunks on a monthly basis will kill mosquito larvae. You can pick up a free mosquito dunk kit at the Birmingham Courthouse Room B -210, Bessemer Justice Center, or Center Point and Hoover satellites.

**For unincorporated Jefferson County: Call 325.5792 to report suspected water pollution - Call 582.6555 to report illegal dumping**

If you have questions, comments, or want to schedule a presentation for your community or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County, email [lyn.diclemente@jccal.org](mailto:lyn.diclemente@jccal.org) or call 325.8741.