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Rain, Rain, Go *This* Way; Tips for Managing Rainwater Runoff in your Yard

(Hampton Roads, Va., April 5, 2023) – April showers bring May flowers—along with rainwater runoff, standing water and potential stormwater pollution concerns for Hampton Roads communities. When it rains, water flows along driveways, rooftops and sidewalks, picking up dirt, trash, oil and grease, fertilizers and other pollutants in its path. All of this gets washed into the storm drain system and then on to local creeks, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.



Choose more plants and less lawn to manage rainfall runoff in your yard.

Addressing stormwater runoff and standing water in lawn and garden areas is one important way to protect the health of our waterways, according to the people who manage the askHRgreen.org public awareness and education initiative.

“Your yard can be one of the greatest defenses against water pollution,” said Rebekah Eastep, an askHRgreen.org team leader. “Every plant, flower, tree and shrub can play a critical role, and there are easy steps you can take to filter rainwater and stabilize the soil.”

To help [slow the flow of stormwater pollution](#), Eastep recommended the following tips:

- **Test your soil before adding lawn fertilizer.** Over fertilizing can result in runoff of chemicals into local waterways—fueling algal blooms, which deprive oxygen needed by fish, blue crabs and other organisms. [Test your soil](#) first, by using a do-it-yourself kit. The results will help you decide how much fertilizer you need for a healthy lawn.
- **Leave grass clippings on the lawn.** You may not need to add fertilizer at all if you are mulching your grass clippings back into the yard; these provide a free, natural source of nitrogen.
- **Seed bare spots.** Bald spots in your yard may cause you to lose topsoil when it rains. If bare spots are in shady areas, consider replacing grass with shade-loving groundcovers and plants.

- **Choose more plants/less lawn.** Trees, shrubs and perennials will help reduce the negative effects of stormwater runoff better than a lawn. When possible, choose native plants, which are drought tolerant, disease resistant and will attract birds and wildlife to your yard. Check the [Native Plants for Southeastern Virginia Guide](#) for inspiration.
- **Mulch bedding areas.** Mulch helps to control erosion, retain moisture, stabilize the soil temperature and prevent weeds. Also, rake leaves into bedding areas; a natural source of mulch!
- **Put rain to work.** You can [install a rain barrel](#) on your home for less than \$100. This home improvement will collect and store rainwater for your outdoor watering needs—reducing your water bill and runoff pollution at the same time!
- **If you live on the water, create a wide plant buffer between your home and the shoreline.** This will intercept sediments and filter out pollutants that run off the land.
- **Install a French drain.** To address standing water in garden areas and around a home's foundation, consider installing a French drain. This sloped underground trench carries water away to an area where it can safely drain.

“Being conscientious about [managing stormwater](#) will help keep pollutants out of the rain's path,” Eastep said. “Not only will it improve your own property, but it will also improve the health of our local waterways and the ecosystems that use it.”

For more tips on working smarter in your yard, visit askhrgreen.org/lawn-garden-best-practices/.

About askHRgreen.org askhrgreen.org is your go-to resource for all things green in Hampton Roads – from recycling tips and pointers for keeping local waterways clean to water-saving ideas and simple steps to make local living easy on the environment. Launched in 2011, the region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and powered by the following members: The cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield; and HRSD. Like askhrgreen.org on [Facebook](#), follow on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), tune in to [YouTube](#) and catch the “Let's Talk Green” [blog](#), written by a team of local experts.