

# PLANT MORE PLANTS

## **A Cleaner Chesapeake Bay Begins in Your Backyard Tips for a Bay-Friendly Lawn**

Stormwater runoff and resulting nutrient pollution are among the most serious issues facing the Chesapeake Bay today. Water quality in the Bay remains extremely poor due to nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution. This pollution, called nutrient loading, contributes to algal blooms, which block light needed for aquatic plant growth, decrease oxygen levels and ultimately disrupt the overall health of the Bay's ecosystem. To mitigate nutrient loading, the flow of pollution must be reduced – starting in our own backyards.

This tip sheet serves as a quick-reference guide to help homeowners adopt conservation gardening and lawn care behaviors that can mitigate nutrient pollution and help improve the health of the Bay.

### **Plant more plants!**

Not only do plants make for a more attractive, healthier landscape, they also filter stormwater runoff and keep erosion at bay, keeping our local waterways cleaner.

### **Go au natural.**

Natural landscaping reduces the need for excessive yard maintenance and fertilizer use, conserves water and minimizes erosion and stormwater runoff. Native plants and grasses require less water and fertilizer. They grow well together, and they are adapted to local conditions such as weather and insects. For a list of plants native to your region, [click here](#).

### **Choose the right grass.**

Select a grass that is well-adapted to your region. Cool-season grasses (such as bentgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, rough bluegrass, red fescue, and perennial ryegrass) are ideal for homes across much of DC/northern Virginia, Baltimore and Richmond. If you live in the Hampton Roads region, you may opt for a cool season grass, or a warm-season variety (for example, bermudagrass and zoysiagrass) may be a better fit.

### **Test your soil first.**

It may need less fertilizer than you think. Results should give you a good indication of the nutrients your lawn needs, as well as prevent over-fertilization, which can lead to phosphorus-rich soils. When it rains, that excess phosphorus is washed into storm drains and can enter Bay waterways.

### **Don't bag your clippings.**

The extra bonus – less work for you! Leaving them on the lawn provides a natural source of nitrogen fertilizer. Be sure to spread them across your lawn – away from your storm drain – for optimum benefit. Also consider using them as compost.

### **Consider using a rain barrel or creating a rain garden.**

These are inexpensive and fairly simple steps that can help prevent stormwater runoff. Rain barrels collect rainwater that would otherwise result in runoff and erosion. Rain gardens not only reduce and filter runoff; they also provide an enhanced habitat for wildlife and can enhance your landscape.

# PLANT MORE PLANTS

## **When should you fertilize?**

This depends on the grass varieties you have. For warm-season grasses, late spring through the summer months are best. If you have cool-season grasses, fall is optimal. Fertilizing during the proper times for your grass promotes root growth and results a healthier, drought-tolerant lawn.

## **If you fertilize...**

Use a phosphorus-free formula. Most lawns already have sufficient phosphorus to meet their needs. In addition, check for options like "slow-release," which promotes a steady, uniform growth and is less likely to wash away as runoff. Also, sweep excess fertilizer off of sidewalks, driveways and other hard surfaces to prevent runoff. Don't fertilize when rain is in the immediate forecast, and never fertilize when the ground is frozen.

## **Pick up after your pets.**

If left untouched, the nutrients in pet waste can enter stormwater runoff and make their way into creeks, rivers and ultimately the Bay. This results in increased nutrient loading, which threatens the integrity of our aquatic ecosystem. Furthermore, the presence of pet waste in runoff poses a threat for potential fecal bacteria contamination – a risk to ecological and human health.

More information on native landscaping and assistance with soil testing can be found through your local Virginia and Maryland Cooperative Extension Agents.

*The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has coordinated the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed since 1983. "Plant More Plants" is the second personal stewardship campaign created by Bay Program partners under the umbrella of The Chesapeake Club. This campaign, along with the earlier "Save the Crabs then Eat 'Em" campaign, strives to share with residential homeowners practices that are beneficial to their lifestyle and to the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Club campaigns are brought to you by the individuals from the following organizations and localities: **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Turfgrass Council, Chesapeake Bay Program, Chesterfield County, Henrico County, Hanover County, the City of Richmond, HR STORM, District of Columbia Department of the Environment, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Maryland Department of the Environment.***

For more information contact Gary Waugh, Campaign Coordinator  
at [Gary.Waugh@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:Gary.Waugh@dcr.virginia.gov)