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Extension Solutions for Homes and Gardens

by Paul J. Pugliese

“Take The Clean Water Challenge; Win a Free Rain Barrel!”

Clean water provides many benefits, including improved public health, quality of drinking water, environmental health, real estate values, tourism, and recreation. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the number one source of water pollution in the U.S. is non-point source pollution, which is pollution from sources that cannot be pinpointed back to a single source. An example of non-point source pollution would be a housing community. Each home in a neighborhood contributes small amounts of water pollution from various sources such as washing cars, fertilizing landscapes, herbicide/pesticide applications, lawn clippings, pet waste, stormwater from roofs and driveways, etc. When you combine these water pollutants from an entire neighborhood, everyone contributes to the bigger problem of non-point source pollution.

In undeveloped areas, vegetation and topsoil naturally absorb and filter stormwater. As towns, cities, and suburbs grow, rainfall that once seeped into the ground now lands on roadways, parking lots, or other impervious surfaces and becomes stormwater runoff. Development and urbanization can greatly increase the volume of water and the concentration of pollutants that run off to rivers and streams. Stormwater from urban areas, erosion, soil disturbing activities, and municipal/industrial discharges all contribute pollutants to water bodies.

There are many environmentally friendly things that you can do around your home to minimize your contribution to the water pollution problem. Simple things such as picking up and disposing your pet’s waste can eliminate harmful bacteria such as E. coli from entering our watersheds. Instead of guessing how much fertilizer and lime to put out on your lawn or garden, consider doing a soil test first to determine exactly how much you need, if any. Excessive application increases the chances of these products leaching into ground water or running off into streams, rivers, and lakes. When these nutrients end up in our waterways, they can cause serious problems for fish and other aquatic wildlife.

Cherokee County is in the heart of the Etowah River Basin, which is one of the most unique and biologically diverse watersheds in the U.S. The Etowah watershed contains 76 native fish species—several such as the Etowah Darter are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act and found nowhere else on earth! So you can help protect these precious natural resources in your own back yard by testing your soil and using fertilizers and other chemicals sparingly and at the proper rates.

Recently, the Cherokee County Extension office in cooperation with the Cherokee Master Gardener Association launched a pledge campaign called “The Clean Water Challenge.” As incentive for this program, we will be giving away 25 rain barrels to Cherokee County residents this year. Rain barrels are a great way to capture rainwater from down-spouts off your home roof to reuse in your landscape, which may come in handy during the next drought. This captured rain water also diverts potential stormwater runoff, by converting it into valuable irrigation water that can be used gradually and allowed to naturally soak into the ground. Disconnecting your downspouts from community storm drains reduces stormwater surges into local watersheds.

To take The Clean Water Challenge, all you have to do is complete a checklist of clean water practices that you can easily do around your home or landscape. Complete the pledge card and return to our office to be instantly entered into this contest to win a FREE rain barrel! The pledge card can be printed from our website at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee under the upcoming local programs section. Click on the link that says “Take the Clean Water Challenge!” You can also come by our office or call us if you would like a copy of the pledge entry form. This program was made possible through grant funding from the Georgia Water Wise Council.

Paul Pugliese is the Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent for Cherokee County Cooperative Extension, a partnership of The University of Georgia, The U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Cherokee County. (770) 479-0418. For more information and free publications, visit our local website at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee

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