

Wilton Conservation Commission e-Newsletter

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our second edition of the Conservation Commission’s e-Newsletter. The new E-format allows us to reach a broader population of readers at a lower cost while making a positive environmental impact. The newsletter was written to be released in June; we apologize for the pandemic-induced delay.

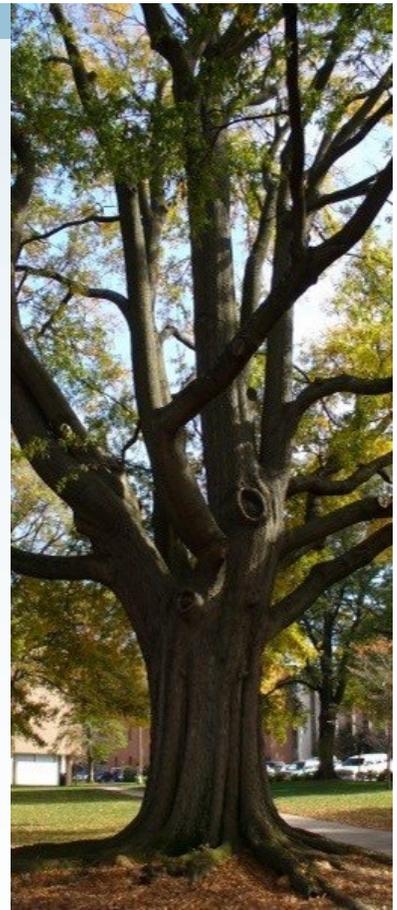
The information in our newsletter remains relevant, however, and we encourage you to consider implementing some of the landscaping suggestions. Fall is the best and easiest time to make changes to your landscape. The cooler weather is ideal for creating new beds and planting.

This past April 22, the world celebrated Earth Day’s 50th Anniversary. The article *Earth Day—Every Day* is more important today than ever before, as we head into 2020 Election Day. The momentous anniversary Earth Day turnout was limited due to the COVID-19 virus, but nature felt the positive impact of our forced stay at home. The first Earth Day sounded the wakeup call for proper stewardship of the environment and resulted in 10 years of bipartisan legislation to improve and protect the environment. Much of the current legislation is in jeopardy and under attack today.

The lineup of articles in this newsletter is meant to inspire, educate and encourage practical actions that individuals can easily do to positively impact the environment and the community we live in. Each of our actions does make a difference. For more ideas to incorporate on your property, view the YouTube discussion by Doug Tallamy on his newest book, *Nature’s Best Hope*. And please sign-up to receive future Conservation Commission e-newsletters follow this link <https://www.wiltonct.org/subscribe>.

Be Well!

Wilton Conservation Commission



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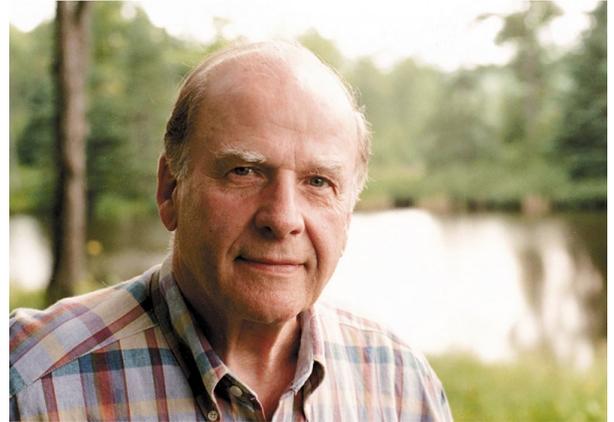
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Earth Day—Every Day

By Susan DiLoreto, Chair Conservation Commission

This past April 22nd was the 50th Anniversary of the first Earth Day. Although outward support of the day was limited to online forums, press releases and socially distanced actions due to the COVID-19 virus, nature felt the positive impact of our stay at home with cleaner air and water, and quieter skies and roadways. The human slowdown has been good for the earth.

A Senator from Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson's objective in planning the first Earth Day was to show the political leadership of the Nation that there was broad and deep support for the environmental movement. Throughout the 1960's he had been frustrated by the fact that few of his Congressional colleagues had any interest in environmental issues. At the same time as he traveled across the United States he was



Gaylord Nelson

Gaylord Nelson had a vision to force the issue of the environment into the political dialogue of the country.

continually impressed by the dedication and the expertise of the many student and citizen volunteers who were trying to solve pollution problems in their own communities. This dedication sparked his idea of holding a "environmental teach-in".

For the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, Tia Nelson, The Director of Climate Programs for the Outrider Foundation and daughter of Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson spoke in a webinar about environmental stewardship and climate change. Tia spent 17 years with The Nature Conservancy as a policy advisor for Latin America and then, the first director of the Global Climate Change Initiative. She was 13 years old on the first Earth Day.

In the interview Tia reflected on her father's vision for an "environmental teach-in" that would spark a global movement and end up successful beyond her father's wildest dreams. His purpose, she explained, was to "force the issue of the environment into the political dialogue of the country." Her father was hoping for a nationwide peaceful demonstration. When April 22, 1970, dawned, literally millions of Americans of all ages and from all walks of life participated in Earth Day celebrations from coast to coast.

"I was not quite prepared for the overwhelming response that occurred on that day. Two thousand colleges and universities, ten thousand high schools and grade schools, and several thousand communities in all, more than twenty million Americans participated in one of the most exciting and significant grassroots efforts in the history of this country." Gaylord Nelson reflecting on the 10th anniversary of Earth Day, 1980.

"When it comes to my father's original vision of an inclusive, bipartisan environmental movement rooted in social justice" Tia stated, "we in the US have much work to do." Tia's advice in concluding the interview was "never underestimate the power of what an individual can accomplish."

Today this vision could not be more important. The following legislation was enacted into law in the ten years following that first momentous Earth Day in 1970 as a result of bipartisan commitment to the environment:

- the Clean Air Act
- the Water Quality Improvement Act
- the Water Pollution and Control Act Amendments
- the Resource Recovery Act
- the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
- the Toxic Substances Control Act
- the Occupational Safety and Health Act
- the Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act
- the Endangered Species Act
- the Safe Drinking Water Act
- the Federal Land Policy and Management Act
- the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act
- the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was signed into law on January 1, 1970

***“More than 60 environmental rules and regulations
Have been officially revoked in the past three years with
34 additional rollbacks in progress”***

Research from Harvard Law School, Columbia Law School and other sources count more than 60 environmental rules and regulations officially revoked in the past three years. An additional 34 rollbacks are still in progress.

“When the Earth Moves” is a short film created by the Outrider Foundation about Gaylord Nelson’s original Earth Day vision and its compelling relevance for today. “The film’s core message is that by working together – across party lines and generational divides – we can address the environmental challenges that affect all of humanity, and the fragile planet upon which all life depends.” Outrider Foundation

Watch the film: <https://outrider.org/climate-change/articles/tia-nelson-50-years-earth-day/>



Recommended reading:

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard by Douglas W. Tallamy - This book outlines Doug Tallamy’s vision for a grassroots, home-grown approach to conservation. *Nature's Best Hope* advocates for homeowners everywhere to turn their yards into conservation corridors that provide wildlife habitats. This home-based approach doesn’t rely on the federal government and protects the environment from the whims of politics. It is also easy to do, and readers will walk away with specific suggestions they can incorporate into their own yards. *Nature's Best Hope* is nature writing at its best - rooted in history, progressive in its advocacy, and above all, actionable and hopeful. Good Reads Review

Recommended viewing: Doug Tallamy’s discussion on *Nature’s Best Hope*, New Canaan Library, March 3, 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHURaRv78QY>

Doug Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 88 research publications and has taught Insect Taxonomy, Behavioral Ecology, Humans and Nature, Insect Ecology, and other courses for 36 years. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. His book *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* was published by Timber Press in 2007 and was awarded the 2008 Silver Medal by the Garden Writers' Association. *The Living Landscape*, co-authored with Rick Darke, was published in 2014. Among his awards are the Garden Club of America Margaret Douglas Medal for Conservation and the Tom Dodd, Jr. Award of Excellence.

Yards are for the Birds

By Jade Hobson, Conservation Commissioner



Northern Cardinal

Types of birds we see in our area include:

- Great Blue Heron
- American Egret
- Mallard Duck
- Canada Goose
- Mallard Duck
- Turkey Vulture
- American Kestrel
- Killdeer
- Various Gulls
- Mourning Dove
- Chimney Swift
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Northern Mockingbird
- Gray Catbird
- Cedar Waxwing
- European Starling
- Scarlet Tanager
- Northern Cardinal
- Indigo Bunting

We are blessed to be surrounded by so much nature in Wilton. In addition to our own personal spaces the town has miles of trails and open space for our perusal. It is spring, the season of rebirth and growth. Birds are migrating from their winter habitats and many songbirds will spend the summer here joining those that make our area their yearlong home. It is mating season and choruses of male and sometimes female birds fill the air with their beautiful songs of love.

Birds and nature do not know about COVID-19. They even appear to be benefiting from the cleaner air and water, quieter skies and roadways. Many state and national parks are closed and people are often required to shelter in place and practice social distancing making for fewer crowded natural areas. Bird watching is often a solitary experience. The human slowdown has been good for birds.

The Pollinator Pathway has introduced corridors of mostly native plantings in the town connecting one garden, meadow, rain garden, group of potted plants, to another, enabling pollinators to travel distances with food sources along the way. Wilton has been a leader in educating the public to the benefits of native plants. Native plants attract native insects which are necessary protein for bird parents to feed to their young. Wilton was the first CT town to establish a Pollinator Pathway. The Wilton Garden Club Conservation Committee has packaged 8 small pollinator plants together in a package to sell at their yearly Plant Sale for the past 3 years. Jackie Algon has written about The Pollinator Pathway for this newsletter.

During these uncertain times while we are sheltering in place, it has been proven that spending time in nature has many health benefits. Nature is healing, soothing and can help to relieve stress.

Planting natives is a good way to invite birds to your yards. Hanging bird feeders is another way. There are a variety of feeders available. The Audubon Society has an online store that sells feeders, seed and is a great source for information. The Brome website, a Canadian high end birdfeeder company is also filled with excellent information. A bird habitat requires a clean source of water for drinking and bathing. It requires places to find shelter from the weather and predators such as areas of dense shrubs, thickets, mature trees, including Conifers and wooded areas. These can also serve as areas to make nests and raise young. It should be herbicide and pesticide free.

Birds that frequent backyard feeders, suet and gardens in our area include: Cardinals, Blue jays, many varieties of Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Wrens, Chickadees, 5 different kinds of Finch, including the bright yellow Goldfinch, Titmice, Sparrow, Warblers, Mourning Doves,

Cont. Yards are for the Birds

and numerous others. Hummingbirds are attracted to a special kind of feeder called a Hummingbird feeder that is filled with sugared water.

What better time than now to reacquaint yourself to the wonders of nature and the miraculous birds that we are fortunate to have visiting and living in our town. Get to know the variety of bird species by look, song and food preference and delight in their presence.

For more information, please visit our website at www.wiltonct.org/conservation.



Hummingbird Feeder

Environmentally Friendly Landscaping: Every Yard Makes a Difference

By Susan DiLoreto, Chair

In Wilton, we are fortunate to have many preserved undeveloped open spaces that provide a critical role in filtering and cleansing our air and watershed. While single family homes may not seem to threaten the overall performance of the larger ecological context, they do in fact disrupt valuable habitats. Native woodlands or meadows are typically replaced with ubiquitous expansive lawns. The conventional seeded lawn erases the site's original biodiversity and increases the possibility of lawn care that can further degrade environmental conditions.

With the majority of land in Wilton being privately held, the watershed health relies on individual landowners' landscape practices. There are numerous landscape "restoration" alternatives to lawn that homeowners can make a positive impact on the environment.

Reconsider what a healthy lawn looks like.

White Dutch clover seed used to be included in lawn seed mixes until herbicide use became popular. Some seed companies are starting to add clover seed again. Clover takes nitrogen out of the air and soil and makes it available to your lawn. It also requires less mowing and attracts honeybees and other pollinators and overtime breaks up compacted soil.



White Clover

Native groundcovers in CT:

- **Trumpet honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*)
- **Narrow-leaf mountain mint** (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*)
- **Eastern purple coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*)
- **Bluets** (*Houstonia caerulea*)
- **Royal fern** (*Osmunda regalis*)
- **Common witch hazel** (*Hamamelis virginiana*)
- **Blue-stemmed goldenrod** (*Solidago caesia*)
- **New England aster** (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)
- **Little bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
- **Eastern red columbine** (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
- **Inkberry** (*Ilex glabra*)
- **Common wild strawberry** (*Fragaria virginiana*)

Replace parts of lawn with native plant communities.

Groundcovers, mixed perennial and shrubs borders, and trees slow the speed of stormwater, increasing the cleansing action that these plant communities provide. This also allows for greater infiltration into the ground water supply before it reaches the Long Island Sound and its feeding tributaries. (see Jackie Algon's articles below "You Made your Bed Now Plant in It" and "Covering Ground About Ground Covers")

Research alternative care options.

Most popular chemical based landscape products have proven to be cost efficient, offering quick and easy visual solutions to landscape maintenance needs. But are we aware of the adverse effects of pesticides and herbicides? Using only non-toxic materials on your property reduces the health risks to yourself, your family, your neighbors and the environment in the community.

Many homeowners outsource their landscape care to local providers. In doing so, we rely on the landscape company to perform best plant care and land management practices. Unfortunately, conventional lawn and plant care still rely heavily on the use of chemicals. Alternative products and methods are increasingly available to homeowners. If we outsource landscape services, we need to ask the specifics of products used and maintenance practices performed. We have choices. Have the discussion so you can make informed choices.

The success of environmental stewardship relies on coordinated community action and increased ecological awareness. The goal is to improve the health and wellbeing of the people and web of life in our care. How we treat our own property impacts the greater community environment. We all are responsible for the environment.

For more information on environmentally friendly lawn care visit Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) website <https://nofa.organiclandcare.net/introduction-to-olc/>. It's a wealth of helpful information for interested homeowners.



Covering Ground on Ground Covers

By Jackie Algon, Commissioner

Along with the trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, annuals, and grasses which homeowners seek to enhance their property, ground covers offer special opportunities for wildlife, the landscape, and the environment.

Ground covers serve numerous purposes which may not be obvious. Some of these include:

- often being early to green-up and flower, providing pollinators nourishment when the pickings are slim in early Spring
- providing shelter and habitat for small mammals, insects and other wildlife
- helping prevent erosion on slopes by holding the soil beneath in place, and growing well in irregular terrain
- filtering groundwater as it enters the soil
- offering landscape texture and design definition to the property while forming a barrier to weeds

While turf is often the preferred ground cover from its historic perception as the image of a well-heeled establishment, there are many better choices that can create visual interest and ensure value for wildlife, the environment and the health of our families.

Having a neatly mown green lawn may give the neighborhood an appearance of tidiness, but other than as a place for recreation, it offers little else. Pollinators and other insects cannot eat it or nest in it; water cannot easily penetrate it; its roots are shallow and cannot effectively filter groundwater; in order to look bright green, many owners invest significant sums each growing season to treat it with amendments, herbicides and fertilizers, many of which have proven deleterious to the health of children and pets who play on it.

If you are sticking with turf you can make it healthier by mowing it high (no less than 3 inches, trimming only the top third of the grass blade) using a cross-cutting blade on your mower, and leaving the clippings as fertilizer. Mowing for the first time of the season as late into May as tolerable can give time for ground nesting bees to hatch and become active pollinators. And leaving to flower what traditionally have been scorned as weeds – violets, dandelions, ajuga – will bring early color at the end of Winter and offer food for the first Spring insects. Cutting only every other week will free-up time for the family member with mower duty, or it can reduce landscaper costs. Once cut, the grass will look green enough to satisfy most of us. The trick is to do less!

If you are feeling especially lazy and adventurous, mark off the least turf needed for your family's recreation and let the rest go untended for a season. You may be surprised - and pleased - to discover the number of native wildflowers that emerge from the seed bank to form a naturalized meadow.

If having a beautiful lawn seems the ultimate underpinning for 'keeping up with the Joneses', it's a good time to reevaluate and consider 'keeping up with the ecology'. If not grass, then *what?* There are many other ground covers to consider in planning and planting gardens.

GRASS TYPES:



Bluegrass



Ryegrass



Fine Fescue



Pachysandra terminalis



Pachysandra procumbens



Shuttleworth's wild ginger



Bishop's Hat



Dwarf Solomon's seal



Lilyturf



Goldenstar

One favorite has been *Pachysandra terminalis*, a fast-growing evergreen plant from Japan and Eastern China that grows about 8"-12" high, spreads by underground rhizomes, and is a member of the Boxwood family. Unfortunately, *P. terminalis* is known to harbor the deer tick which transmits Lyme and other diseases. Should you decide to replace your *P. terminalis*, dig down about 6" to release the roots and roll-up the plants like a carpet, leaving the loosened soil in place, ready for a replacement ground cover.

A better choice is the native, *Pachysandra procumbens*, which is a slower growing plant and less shiny than *P. terminalis*. This plant can tolerate the shade of large trees such as oaks. It contributes to completion of the lifecycle of many species of caterpillars/butterflies that leave the shelter of the tree canopy returning to ground to lay their eggs underground or on the leaves of this pachysandra and other native ground covers.

Shuttleworth's wild ginger (*Asarum shuttleworthii*) is low-growing and spreads slowly by creeping rhizomes, forming four-inch-high mats of leaves. The two-inch-diameter leaves have a rich, grayish green color with striking, silvery gray markings.

Ground covers of the *Epimedium* genus come in great numbers of species and can offer a variety of colors and markings. Originally from the Far East, and commonly referred to as Bishop's Hat, they are resistant to many pests and deer do not browse them. They grow well under trees and prefer acidic well-drained soil in part- to full-shade. Epimedium send up delicate flowers in early Spring in as wide an array of colors as the variety of species making an elegant edging.

Cornus canadensis is a member of the Dogwood family. Commonly called Bunchberry, it spreads quickly in acidic soil and forms a 6-8" ground cover of whorled leaves. It bears large white bracts that resemble flowers in early summer and clusters of bright red berries afterward. A wide range of wildlife relish this groundcover for its berries, stems and leaves.

Dwarf Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum humile*) grows by rhizomes and quickly forms a cover in shaded acidic soil. It can tolerate tree-root competition and produces 6-8" high soft green leaves with small, bell-shaped flowers followed by bluish black, ball-shaped fruit.

Liriope muscari, or Lilyturf, grows in grass-like clumps that reach 8-10" in height. It bears a stalk of small, bluish-violet flowers above the foliage in summer. Liriope is used for garden borders, to inhibit erosion on slopes, and under trees where other plants don't grow well.

Saxifraga stolonifera is known as Mother of Thousands because of its ability to reproduce round, silver-veined leaves and send out thin, red stolons resulting in a low ground cover with 2-foot-high plumes of small, white flowers in late spring.

Goldenstar (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), gets its name from the bright yellow, daisy-like flowers it bears in Spring and again in late Summer. Its foliage spreads slowly into a tight, low-growing ground cover that is 4 to 6 inches high. This native plant grows well in medium to full shade and likes a little morning sun.

Wild cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*) spreads both by seeding itself widely and by rhizomes. It grows on long stems and forms a dense cover of deeply lobed gray-green deciduous leaves that are 18-24" tall. In early spring, blue flowers appear in loose clusters facing up, above the leaves. Easily grown in acidic soil and some sun and light shade, it resists

Insects and spreads quickly.

A champion in the race of fast-growing ground cover, Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*) forms a dense, 8- to 12"-tall mat of silver-speckled leaves with a profusion of yellow flowers above in early Spring.

Creeping phlox, or moss phlox, has low-growing clusters of small, evergreen leaves with shades of pink, blue, or white flowers. Rising above the foliage on thin stems in Spring, they give the appearance of a mat of flowers floating above the ground. This is a native perennial that is lovely cascading over slopes and garden walls.

Creeping thyme (*Thymus praecox*) is a wild variety of thyme herb. It is often grown between stepping stones because foot traffic releases a pleasant scent. This tiny-leaved woody perennial likes full sun and well-drained dry to average soil and reaches about three inches in height with spikes of tiny pink-purple blossoms from June through July.

Lamium maculatum (Deadnettle) grows in part to full shade. Leaves are variegated green and silvery-white, and pink blossoms appear from May through July. This woody perennial likes well-drained dry to average soil and full sun.

Galium odoratum, commonly called Sweet Woodruff, is a Eurasian fragrant perennial with whorled emerald green star-shaped leaves. Its star-like white blossoms rest on the leaves during May and June. A vigorous spreader, this species makes a dense, 15-inch-high ground cover in part to full shade and moist, well-drained soils.

You Made Your Bed Now Plant It — Solarizing to Prepare Garden Bed Soil

By Jackie Algon, Commissioner

With the energies of a community locked-up in our homes since Winter, many persons have decided to explore gardening for the first time. Preparing a bed for a flower or vegetable garden is not as easy as you might think; it takes lots of work. For those who prefer an easier way to accomplish this, try solarization.

This method concentrates on eliminating the weed seed bank and the pests in the soil beneath, using no chemicals:

- mow or weed-whack whatever is growing on top of the ground in the space you want to plant.
- moisten the soil, or wait until after it rains
- then roll out a clear plastic sheet over the area
- seal any holes or damaged spots in the plastic and press out any air pockets
- bury the edges under soil and anchor the plastic with heavy rocks.
- no lifting the edges to peek!

The most effective time to solarize is when it is sunniest: around the Summer Solstice. The sun will heat the water in the soil to 100 or more degrees, creating a greenhouse effect and eradicating the weeds and pests in the soil under the tarp. Two weeks of continuous sun should accomplish the deed. For perennial weeds, more time may be needed. Solarization is also possible in the Fall, after harvest, but it is less effective, as the air temperatures cannot heat the soil to the depth needed in the same amount of time. Best would be to clear the space of weeds as preparation for Spring and then solarize for about a month in Spring before planting.



Using black plastic is also effective, as is wetted cardboard or newspaper, but these will take longer since they are working to smother rather than 'cook' the weeds and pests.

How Well is Your Well?

By Jackie Algon, Commissioner

Most residents living in Wilton rely on a well for their water. Like most of the components of our houses, we regularly provide attention to our gardens, to our infrastructure indoors – changing paint colors, upgrading appliances, replacing furniture. But how many of us think about the health and structural well-being of our well? Like our septic system, we cannot live in our home if the well, the septic system, the oil reservoir are not in good shape.

- As a rule of thumb, your well water should be tested annually for contaminants and basic indicators to ensure you are drinking pure water.
 - ◇ Check for land uses within sight of the well.
- The well itself also should be inspected each year for obvious signs of damage or contamination.
 - ◇ Keep the area 75' around the well free of objects such as logs, pesticides and herbicides that can cause problems to integrity of the well and to purity of the water it delivers.
- Once every ten years a licensed or certified professional well water contractor should inspect your well
 - ◇ Keep the records associated with each of those inspections.

Remember: what we put onto the ground may end up in our drinking water!

For more information about water wells, see the references below; for issues about a water well, reach out to the Wilton Health Department [Email: Health@wiltonct.org or call (203) 563-0174]. However, because the Health Department is currently dealing with Covid-19 issues, it may be best to contact a professional contractor.

Best Management Practice Checklist for Private Well Testing: https://ct.gov/private_wells
<https://wellowner.org/basics/eight-tips-for-maintaining-your-well/>
<https://extension.psu.edu/water-well-maintenance-and-rehabilitation>
https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/public/water_quality.html



Properly Disposing of Dog Waste

More Than Just Common Courtesy

By Frank Simone, Commissioner & Susan DiLoreto, Chair

Did you know that **dog waste is not a fertilizer**? In fact, it is usually pretty toxic to plants and high in acidity.

Can dog waste contaminate water? **When rain washes over dog poop** and flows into drainage systems **it carries contaminants into local waterways**. Studies indicate that about 90% of fecal coliform bacteria, which is used as a measure of water health and quality, is of non-human origin, mostly canine. High spikes in this bacteria can necessitate closing waterways to swimming and shell fishing.

During these stay at home times many of us are spending more time with our pets, and dog walking seems to be a favorite. **Picking up your dog's waste and disposing of it properly is more than just a common courtesy.**



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