

Backyard Conservation: Personal Decisions That Affect Water Quality

What can you do to protect your water quality?

1. Conserve water – the less you use, the less you pollute

- Use low flow faucets, showerheads, toilets, appliances.
- Check for water leaks.
- Take short showers instead of full tub baths.
- Avoid letting faucets run unnecessarily.
- Only use fully loaded dish and clothes washers.
- Wash cars only when necessary.

2. Practice conservation landscaping and gardening

- Choose conservation landscape plants (native plants that do not require much water).
- Limit watering of lawns and gardens.
- Install rain barrels and use water for irrigation of lawns and gardens.
- Limit paved areas on your property.
- Maintain a vegetated buffer along streams and around springs and sinkholes.
- Landscape and stabilize bare soil areas to prevent erosion.
- Reduce the use of fertilizers and apply them properly. Test your soil first.
- Use certified lawn care operators having DCR water quality agreements.
- Encourage your locality/ homeowner association to follow a certified nutrient management plan.

3. Protect your well

- Do not place or store objects or materials on or in close proximity to the well head/house.
- Pollution sources that should not be located near your well include: septic drain field, underground storage tank, barnyard / livestock access, retention pond, parking areas, pesticide / fertilizer application area (gardens, crops).
- Have your well water tested periodically to see if it is safe. Annually is best.
- Contact the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project to have a confidential environmental risk assessment performed.

4. Care for and maintain your septic system

- Know what kind of system you have, follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions.
- Inspect your system annually. Look for signs of failure.
- Have your conventional system pumped out every 3 to 5 years. Keep a record.
- Do not park or drive on any part of the system.
- Do not dispose of the following down the drain or toilet:
 - Nondegradables – grease, disposable diapers, feminine products, plastics
 - Toxics – gasoline, oils, paint thinner, pesticides, antifreeze
- Use bleach, disinfectants and drain and toilet bowl cleaners sparingly. Look for those that state they are septic system safe.
- Do not use a garbage disposal. It can rapidly overload the system with solids.

5. Be a pooper-scooper

- Pick up after your pet using paper towels for pick up and a small plastic bag for storage.
- Seal the bag and dispose of it in the garbage for eventual disposal in the landfill.

6. Reduce use of toxic chemicals and dispose of them properly

- Use chemicals (e.g., gasoline, oils, paint, paint thinner, pesticides, antifreeze, etc.) only when necessary and follow instructions for proper use and disposal.
- Take unused chemicals and chemical containers to designated toxic chemical disposal areas at your local landfill.
- Recycle used motor oil, oil filters & antifreeze by taking them to a service station or landfill.

7. Do not use storm drains, streams or sink holes for trash or waste disposal

8. Don't be a litterbug.

9. Reduce unnecessary driving

Sources of Information on Backyard Conservation:

Synopsis of Backyard Conservation Tips:

- Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, www.dcr.virginia.gov/waterways/index.htm

Water Conservation:

- Virginia Department of Health, www.vdh.state.va.us/dw/wtr_conserve_tips.asp

Conservation Landscaping:

- Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, 130 Carriebrooke Drive, Stephens City, VA 22655, 540-868-1130
- Virginia Cooperative Extension (Bobby Clarke), 600 N. Main Street, Suite 100, Woodstock, VA 22664, 540-459-6140, soil sampling information: www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/compost/452-129/452-129.html
- Natural Resources Conservation Service, Winchester Service Center, 540-868-1130
- Natural Resources Conservation Service, Woodstock Service Center, 540-459-5735
- Virginia Native Plant Society, 400 Bland Farm Lane, Unit #2, Boyce, VA 22620, 540-837-1600, www.VNPS.com
- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Bayscapes information, www.acb-online/project.cfm?vid=85
- Lawn care operators certified by VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/varivers.htm

Well Care:

- Virginia Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet on “Well and Spring Management” www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/farmasyst/442-902/442-902.html
- Local county health department (Clarke: 540-955-1033, Frederick/Winchester: 540-722-3480, Shenandoah: 540-459-3733, Warren: 540-635-3159)
- Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, www.well-aware.org/program.html

Septic / On-site Sewage Disposal System Care:

- Virginia Department of Health, www.vdh.state.va.us/onsite/Howitworks/index032604.asp
- Local county health department (see well care list)

Toxic Chemicals / Used Oil

- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, used motor oil, oil filters and antifreeze collection sites, www.deq.virginia.gov/recycle/usedoil.html

Volunteer Stewardship of Water Resources

- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, volunteer stewardship activities, www.dcr.state.va.us/stewardship/svresourceguide.htm
- Valley Watershed / Conservation Organizations:
 - Friends of the Shenandoah River, 540-636-4948, www.fosr.org
 - Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, 540-459-8550
 - The Opequon Watershed, Inc., 609 S. Braddock St., Winchester, VA 22601, 540-667-4272
 - Shenandoah Valley Pure Water 2000 Forum, 540-568-2668, www.purewaterforum.org
 - Valley Conservation Council, 540-886-3541, www.valleyconservation.org
 - Potomac Conservancy, 301-608-1188, www.potomac.org