OCTOBER 2018

CONSERVATION CURRENTS

MONTHLY EDITION

Fall Composting in Your Yard

UPCOMING EVENT: DIY COMPOSTER WORKSHOP

With fall upon us, your yard will soon be covered in the season's greatest gift: organic matter! Or, more specifically, leaves, and lots of 'em. Those who connect leaves only to the drudgery of raking are missing the big picture. Leaves are full of carbon and nutrients! Recycle them into the ground and feed the soil's teeming microbiome of bacteria and fungi. Soil microbes extract nutrients from decomposing leaves and convert them into plant-usable forms.

How you can aid this nutrient cycling? Make a compost pile! A good pile will have a balance of "green" materials high in nitrogen, like kitchen scraps, and "brown" materials high in carbon, such as fall leaves. A pile of 1 part "greens" to 2 parts "browns" should make garden-ready compost within a few months.

An even simpler way to compost your leaves is to run over them with the mower until the pieces settle into the lawn. Earth worms and other burrowers will incorporate them into the soil where they will decompose. The best part? No raking!

The Conservation District will be hosting a DIY Composter Workshop on November 10th in Falls Church. If you are interested in attending, please contact Dan Schwartz: dan.schwartz@fairfaxcounty.gov, 703-324-1422

Learn more about the DIY tumbler composter workshop program at https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/build-your-own-tumbler-composter

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NORTHERN VIRGINIA SWCD SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Is Cool Season Cover Crop Planting Necessary for Our Gardens?

Willie Woode, Senior Conservation Specialist

Here's hoping you had a great gardening experience this year! Sooner than later, the weather will get colder and garden plants will yield to the cold temperatures. Most people may think, "It's time to let the soil rest!" Actually, because soil is a living entity, it does not need rest. Rather, it needs to be kept active so that all its millions of microbes can continue to stay alive through the winter months.

To keep your soil active, you can grow a "cool season cover crop mix." This practice is recommended because the species in the mix rebuild the soil by:

- Improving soil structure through increased soil microbial activities
- Increasing water infiltration and water holding capacity
- Reducing soil compaction
- Enhancing soil organic matter
- Recycling plant nutrients; plants take up and store nutrients which otherwise may leach below the root zone, while deep rooted plants (such as radishes) reach deep into the soil and draw nutrients back up into the root zone of normal plants
- Enriching soil nitrogen content, as legumes (nitrogen fixing plants) such as snow peas, beans, white clover, and hairy vetch convert atmospheric nitrogen into plant-available nitrogen
- Insulating the soil to allow microbes to survive cold winter months

A common cool season seed mix can include legumes (such as snow peas, Hairy Vetch, and White clover), grasses (such as triticale and annual/winter rye), and brassica (such as rapeseed, turnip, and radish).

The seeds of cool season cover crop mix are best planted by broadcasting method, about a month (15 – 45 days) before the first killing frost. In Fairfax County the average date for the first killing frost is October 25.

Cool season cover crops should be tilled into the soil about a month before spring planting, or before they flower or seed. If the cover crops are allowed to flower or seed, accumulated plant nutrients that should be available for your new garden plants would have been utilized in making the flowers and seeds.

Volunteer Experiences: Stream Monitoring

Samiksha Prabhu, Volunteer

It was a pleasant morning. Me and my family were getting ready to leave for our stream monitoring session. This was a special session as we would be doing monitoring as an independent team under observation of another certified monitor. We were all excited, as we wanted to see who would identify the most critters with accuracy.

We went to our site and were given a brief overview by our conservation district representative on the environmental impact we were creating as a society and how monitoring of streams was providing valuable information on water quality and stream restoration.

Then we were ready to have fun doing stream monitoring! We spread our net and collected our critters. Our table was already set with the tweezers and ice tray filled with water. So we laid our net on the table and started to sort the macro invertebrates.

One of them caught my attention. It was small, and very active. I thought I could identify it, but wanted to confirm and I grabbed the microscope and placed the bug on the slide. I saw an amazing creature. It had three tails, had gills on the abdomen, and is a good bug. If you thought it was a mayfly, you guessed it!!

It was an unforgettable environmental science experience. If you like critters, you will enjoy it too!!

Learn more about stream monitoring with NVSWCD by visiting https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/volunteer-stream-monitoring

Meet your Conservation District!

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Urban Conservation Engineer, Asad Rouhi
Soil Scientist, Dan Schwartz
Office Manager, Heather Shackley
Senior Conservation Specialist, Willie Woode

Northern Virginia Soil & Water Conservation District
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation

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Conservationdistrict@fairfaxcounty.gov
703-324-1460 TTY 711

"Watersheds: Our Water, Our Home"

Conservation Poster Contest Winners

We are proud to announce the winners of this year's local Conservation Poster Contest, "Watersheds: Our Water, Our Home!" In the 2018 contest season, Northern Virginia Soil & Water Conservation District received 40 contest entries from sustainability-minded students across Fairfax County.

First place posters from our local competition will receive a local prize of a $25 gift certificate and move on to the state competition. Although PreK students are not eligible for the national contest, we received so many lovely entries that we will be awarding an Honorable Mention prize at the local level.

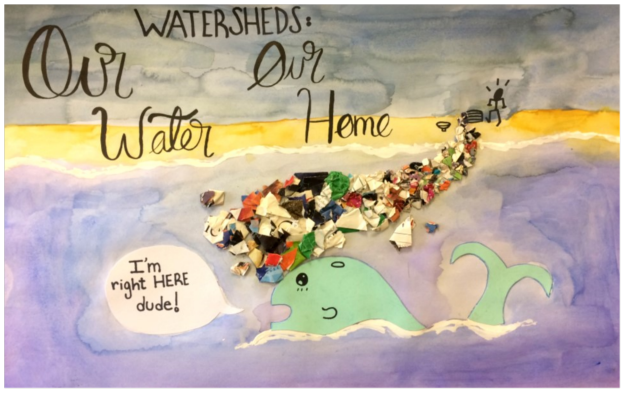
The annual Conservation Poster Contest gives K-12 students across the United States the opportunity to show what they know about conservation through art and exhibits the impact of the local SWCD's outreach and education efforts. Topics for the poster vary each year, and scouts that enter also receive a poster contest scout badge.

Learn more about the annual conservation poster contest by visiting https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/conservation-poster-contest. The entry period opens in early spring each year.

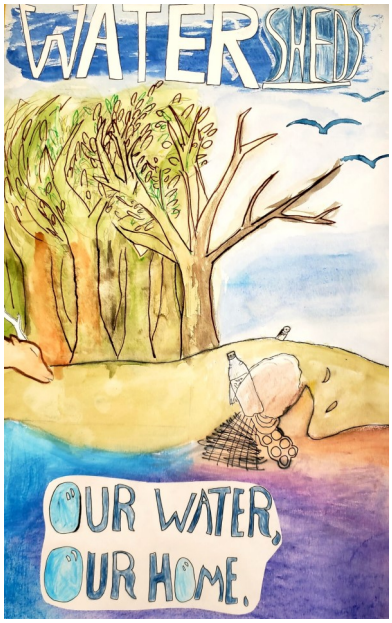
PK-1st Grade Winner
Gabriella Le Moigne, Age 6

2nd-3rd Grade Winner
Mayron Zelalem, Age 8

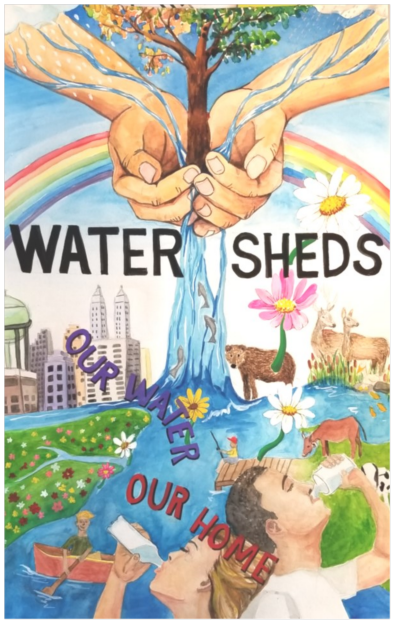
PreK Honorable Mention, Caroline Graboicz, Age 4



7th-9th Grade Winner, Sonakshi Thakuria, Age 13



4th-6th Grade Winner
Chepke Sallai, Age 12



10th-12th Grade Winner
Sarah Kim, Age 16

Relentless Rain

Heather Shackley, NVSWCD Office Manager

Relentless. I was listening to the weather report on the radio while driving to work yesterday, and that's how they described the rain. Relentless. The forecaster went on to say that 2018 is sizing up to be one of the wettest years on record. However soggy, sloshy and wet we are, at least we are setting a record! Still, most days I feel like I'm just waiting to mildew. I'm tired of the wet weather and I know I am not alone.

In fact, I hear from dozens of Fairfax County residents every week seeking help with their soggy yards, wet basements, and overloaded drainage systems. During July and August, our call and email volume was 88% higher than during the same months last year, with the majority of those calls coming from homeowners with drainage and erosion issues. Following up on these phone calls and emails have kept everyone here so busy that we've started to refer to our "rainy day" projects as "sunny day" projects. As in, "that project will have to wait for a sunny day!" I know the weather is bound to change. In the meantime, what can you do while you wait?

- To report a problem with a Fairfax County-maintained stormwater facility, please use the Stormwater Facility Maintenance Request Form: https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/stormwater/maintenance-and-inspections/stormwater-facility-maintenance-request-form or call the Maintenance and Stormwater Management Division at 703-877-2800.
- Work Together! Wet conditions or erosion problems often occur throughout a neighborhood. Coordinating with neighbors and addressing problems at the source can save everyone time and money.
- Check out our online **Drainage and Erosion Guide for Homeowners** for tips on how to solve common issues: https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/drainage-problem.

Now, where did I put my umbrella?

Fun at Fall for Fairfax Kidsfest!

Here's a huge thank you to the over 200 people that visited the NVSWCD table at Fall for Fairfax Kidsfest! At this festival help on September 29th and 30th, our staff shared information about our agency, how we can help with soil and water concerns, and upcoming volunteer opportunities for individuals and families.

We engaged children and adults alike with our activities – making leaf rubbings and seed bombs! To make a leaf rubbing, place a leaf under a piece of paper and rub a crayon on top of it. The outline and veins of the leaf will show through, making beautiful designs!

Seed bombs consist of a variety of different seeds rolled up in a clay-and-compost ball that both protects the seeds and provides additional nutrients. After drying, they are tossed into an area where you want the plants to grow, like your garden or an open field. Bombs away! After it rains, the seeds are released from the clay and begin to grow.