



# JEFFCO H<sub>2</sub>O NEWS

ISSUE 11 - SPRING SUMMER 2015

*Marvelous Mulch | What's Happening? | Go Vertical! | Green with Envy | Smorgasbird*

## Marvelous Mulch



Yes, mulch really is marvelous! But how is it different from compost? Compost is any kind of decayed organic material - vegetable scraps, leaves, grass clippings, or similar material. Finished compost is brown and crumbly, smells earthy, and is packed with rich nutrients that plants need to grow. Compost is best used by working it into the soil so that plants can absorb these nutrients through their roots. On the other hand, mulch is organic material that is spread on top of the soil as a protective layer. The main reason for using mulch is to minimize gardening chores, and who can argue with that? That's why it's pretty much impossible to say enough good things about mulch. Even if you never were good at math, it's easy to see that when you add up the [benefits of mulch](#), they greatly outweigh the cost and effort to install and maintain it. A fresh layer of mulch around plants, bushes and trees creates an instant facelift for your landscape. (Fresh mulch = enhanced curb appeal.) Maintaining a layer of mulch about 3 inches deep creates a protective layer which stabilizes soil, reduces soil erosion, and suppresses weed growth. (Fewer weeds = less need for weed killer.) Mulch also helps soil absorb water more efficiently and traps in moisture. (More moisture = less frequent watering.) Mulch prevents harmful fluctuations in soil temperature, promotes better root systems, and assists plants in resisting pests and disease. (More resilient plants = healthier, lush landscape.) Mulch promotes the growth of beneficial soil microorganisms which gradually decompose the mulch and help to enrich the soil from the top down. (Richer soil = less need for fertilizer.) And most importantly, mulch reduces yard work. (Less work = more free time!) Bottom line: including mulch in your yard truly provides one of the greatest returns on your investment than nearly any other landscape element.

## What's Happening?

**Birmingham Botanical Gardens Spring Plant Sale, April 9-12** - 780 Brookwood Village, Birmingham. Visit [bbgardens.org](http://bbgardens.org) to learn more.

**Do Dah Day, May 16** - Caldwell and Rhodes Parks, Birmingham. Storm Water Management staff will be there again this year with the ever popular poo toss game. Pet waste bags and [flyers](#) will be distributed to reinforce the importance of proper pet waste disposal.

**Brown Bag Seminar Series** - Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 2612 Lane Park Road, Birmingham. This free [seminar](#) series offers practical landscape design, fresh lawn and garden ideas, and proper planting and maintenance techniques. No reservations are required; light refreshments provided.

**Step Away from the Spray!** - Stop by Storm Water Management (B-210 Courthouse Annex) to pick up a free mosquito dunk kit. These biologic dunks target and kill mosquito larvae in standing water, can't accidentally kill pollinators like bees or butterflies, and do not harm water quality, pets or wildlife.

## Go Vertical!



Need some ideas to perk up your deck, porch or patio area? Try looking UP rather than out and consider installing a vertical garden. Vertical gardens have increased in popularity over the past few years for many reasons. The obvious is that they are a great way to create a big impact in a small outdoor space since this concept makes it possible to really define an area with thoughtfully chosen placement, plants and containers. There currently are many products available which have built in planters, pouches, or holders where plants or pots can be placed to make creating a vertical garden easy. Alternatively, [ideas](#) for designing and constructing your own [vertical garden](#) using plastic soda bottles, jars, cans, garden fencing, gutters, hanging shoe organizers, or [pallets](#) are readily available online. The benefits of vertical gardening go way beyond saving space. Vertical gardens can be configured to maximize water use by allowing water to drip downward from one level to the next. Any water that is not utilized by the plants on the lowest tier can be collected at the base of the frame or wall and reused as needed, eliminating any potential runoff. Also, vertical gardens are usually more pest resistant than traditional container gardens because most

insects will not make the upward trek to munch on them! Strategically placed, a vertical garden can assist with home energy costs because it provides shade and can serve as a natural insulator for the external walls of your home. Since they are space and water efficient, a vertical garden also can be installed inside your home where it can greatly improve interior air quality while providing a dramatic focal point for any room.

## Green with Envy



In most neighborhoods, there is that one lawn that is beautifully maintained, lushly green and impeccably manicured. Often, that homeowner spends nearly every waking hour in the yard, tending to the tiniest detail to achieve near perfection. While some people just love spending time in the yard, many simply do not have the time or the desire to do so, but still would like to have a pretty lawn. This paradox often leads to the purchase and overuse of all types of fertilizers and weed killers in the quest for effortless perfection. Yard chemicals can be very helpful if used and applied correctly, but can be a source of water pollution if guidelines are not followed. And using too much or the wrong type of yard chemicals is a waste of both time and money. So is it possible to have a nice looking lawn that is stormwater friendly without investing a huge amount of time, effort, and expense? Click [here](#) to read what James Horton, Director of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens and well-known turfgrass expert, says about the care and maintenance of residential lawns.

## Smorgasbird



One of the fastest growing hobbies in the US is bird watching. More than 46 million people consider themselves to be bird watchers and about 60 million people regularly feed birds in order to attract them to their yards. While many varieties of bird seed blends are readily available, the cost can quickly add up. Rather than just purchasing seed to fill your bird feeders, another option is to plant and grow a variety of [plants](#), trees and grasses in your yard now so that they will produce berries and seeds that birds like to eat. Many of these are native to our region, and generally are more drought and pest resistant, which can help reduce the need for supplemental watering and the use of yard chemicals. Inviting birds to become frequent visitors to your yard has other benefits as well. Most songbirds primarily eat insects and spiders during the spring and summer months, which can help reduce the insect pest population in your yard without the use of insecticides. It's also important to provide a water source to encourage birds to stick around. A birdbath with a gently sloping shallow bowl (which birds prefer) is a simple and easy to install water feature to add to your yard, but any shallow, wide container or similar vessel lined with some clean gravel or rocks, filled with a few inches of water, and placed on the ground can work just as well. Then, just sit back and enjoy your visitors.

**To report suspected water pollution in unincorporated Jefferson County, call 205.325.5792!**

*If you have questions or comments, or would like to schedule a presentation for your neighborhood or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County, please email [diclementel@jccal.org](mailto:diclementel@jccal.org) or call 205.325.8741.*