



JEFFCO H₂O NEWS

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Please Don't Feed the Weeds



Sure, winter is still here and it's cold outside. But for those of you who have visions of lush green turf grass dancing in your heads, rest assured that a beautiful well-kept lawn is just a few months away. It's important to know what type of turf grass you have prior to applying any products. The most common grasses for our area are Bermuda, zoysia, centipede and St. Augustine. These are called warm season grasses because they go dormant in cold weather. [Experts](#) recommend applying a pre-emergent product to your lawn once per year. If you missed this chore in the fall, mid to late February is an ideal time to eliminate weeds before they have a chance to establish. This preemptive strike could reduce the need for herbicides later in the growing season. One temptation is also to fertilize the lawn before it is "awake". Fertilizing your lawn before it is green and ready to uptake nutrients will only provide an ideal situation for weeds to grow, waste your money, and possibly provide an opportunity for rain to wash the fertilizer into local waterways. Always wait until the temperatures are warm enough so that there is no chance of frost, and your turf grass is completely green before applying the right fertilizer for your soil's needs. For best results, FIRST do a soil test to determine exactly what nutrients are missing. You can pick up a FREE [soil test kit](#) in Room 260, Jefferson County Courthouse, or at your local [Alabama Extension Office](#). The cost to mail and receive an analysis from Auburn University is \$7 per sample. Then, choose the right product for the job and ALWAYS follow label directions.

Off to a Rocky Start



Rocks and well kept yards often don't go hand in hand. Rocks usually are viewed as intruders in an otherwise pristinely mulched landscape. But rocks do have some intrinsic value that might be worth capitalizing on as you prepare your yard for the growing season. For starters, if you've ever lifted a rock and taken a peak underneath, you probably have seen all sorts of activity going on: earthworms, bugs, and other critters live in the dark and moist areas under rocks and stones. These little guys happily munch away at organic materials and create nutrient rich soil. Rocks also help to keep organic materials like leaves and twigs in place so that they can decompose and perpetuate the cycle. Rocks help soil hold onto moisture, and also can help soil to drain better. Strategically placing rocks also can hold soil in place, thereby reducing soil erosion. Adding rocks to your garden can serve as an effective barrier against weeds, and will require less replenishing when compared to traditional mulch since they take many years to break down. If you prefer to use stones that are golf ball size or smaller, installing a weed barrier first is recommended. In some cases, hard surfaces like rocks can help moderate soil temperature since they heat up in the sun and cool down in the shade. But because large areas covered with stones can experience significant changes in soil temperature, stone mulch is not recommended for some plants and shrubs. Rocks added to a traditionally mulched area can create interest and texture along with their other benefits. Finally, as they are exposed to freezing and thawing, plant roots and acids, and precipitation, rocks slowly break down into the mineral particles which make up most of the [earth's soil](#) - the epitome of slow release fertilizer!

What's Happening?

AL People Against a Littered State (PALS) Spring Cleanup - Want to make a difference in your community? Consider organizing or participating in a volunteer roadside litter cleanup. Last year, 1076 volunteers participated in 35 cleanups, removing 57 tons of litter and trash from roadways in unincorporated Jefferson County. Several of these volunteers received statewide awards for their efforts. Cleanup resources such as flyers, gloves, bags, safety t-shirts, traffic control and trash disposal are available for FREE to unincorporated Jefferson County Communities. Call 325-8741 to learn how your community can participate!

Tree Seedling Giveaway - February 22 - Celebrate Arbor Day and stop by Linn Park from 8 am - 2 pm to select FREE tree seedlings ready for planting. For more information, call 787-5222 or 781-0598.

25th Annual Plant Dig - February 25 - Grab your shovels, wheeled carts, and come on out to the New Georgia Landfill between 8 am and 1 pm to select and bring home some FREE native plants, just in time for your spring gardening plans! Call 787-5222 or 781-0598 to learn more.

Face Lift



There's just something about the anticipation of spring - more daylight, the prospect of warmer weather, flowers blooming - that makes us want to get our living space in shape. And after several months of cold weather, [home exteriors](#) could probably use some attention and care. Spring is a great time to clean out gutters and make sure that they are flowing freely. This is also an ideal time to consider diverting the downspouts so that rain can soak into your yard away from the foundation, or installing a few rain barrels to capture rain for later use - both of which are excellent ways to [manage stormwater](#) on your property. Spring is often the time that people pressure wash the exterior of the home, deck and paved areas. It is important to [prevent](#) the wash water from entering the storm drain system, since it will pick up and carry dirt, oil, and yard chemicals to the nearest waterway. If you plan to use a cleaning product outside, make sure to choose the least toxic. Fresh paint is another popular project for spring. If you are painting the exterior of your home, remember to clean brushes, rollers and other tools inside in the sink to prevent paint from washing into the storm drain system. Some paint thinners and solvents can be reused rather than discarded if allowed to settle out. When patching and sealing driveways, make sure bags of cement are kept covered and apply sealants only when rain is not in the forecast. Just a reminder - also consider using the least [toxic products](#) inside your home to protect your family's health. You probably have all of the ingredients you need to [clean most things](#) in your home sitting in your pantry!

Frondly Yours



With their intricate leaf patterns and delicate texture, ferns can give a lush, cool splash of green peeking out from under the tree canopy in your landscape's shady or partially shady areas. Often these areas are traditionally planted with ground covers to eliminate places with bare soil. However, some ground covers such as English ivy are considered invasive because of the aggressive way in which they overtake other plants and trees. [Using native ferns](#) in these often hard to grow areas provides interest while cohabiting well with other vegetation. In spite of their ethereal appearance, ferns can tolerate many different types of soil, are resistant to most pests and diseases, and require little care once established, thereby reducing the need for fertilizers and other yard chemicals. They adapt to available water, and are able to go dormant in drought situations while coming back the next season. Many ferns remain green all year round. Some ferns do enjoy a layer of mulch which helps moderate soil temperature and maintain moisture. When choosing which ferns to purchase, matching the plant's need for sun, water, and nutrients with its location in the landscape will help ensure its success. Besides being just another pretty plant, ferns were valued for their medicinal properties by Native Americans who used them to treat ailments. As with anything growing in your yard or the woods, never ingest it unless you are positive what it is and what its properties are.

For unincorporated Jefferson County: Call 325.5792 to report suspected water pollution - Call 582.6555 to report illegal dumping

If you have questions, comments, or want to schedule a presentation for your community or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County, email lyn.diclemente@jcca.org or call 325.8741.