



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

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## From the Bottom Up



Magical things can happen when you add mulch to your garden beds. Well, maybe not exactly magical, but pretty close to it! From retaining moisture and suppressing weeds to improving soil and just making your landscape look clean and cared for, [mulch](#) can add tremendous benefits to your yard. Commercially available mulch comes in many varieties, colors and textures. Probably the most common mulch used in the southeast is pine bark or pine straw. An organic mulch like bark or straw is usually recommended over inorganic mulches such as gravel and rock or rubber for most garden bed uses due to its many benefits. If cost is a factor, a free and readily available mulch option is using grass clippings, fallen leaves, or other yard debris which can be shredded or chopped to an even texture before applying to garden beds. Since organic mulch usually tends to be acidic, plants that prefer slightly alk aline soil may need the addition of a little lime with the mulch. [Testing your soil](#) can take away the guess work, saving you time and money.

Garden experts recommend applying mulch to a depth of 2-4 inches. Keep mulch 6-12 inches away from tree trunks to allow air to reach the roots. If an area is prone to weeds, using a double mulching technique can help. After installing plants, water them and spread a thick layer of newspaper or cardboard over the soil in the areas between the plants and top with organic mulch. The layer of newspaper/card board will help suppress weeds while gradually decomposing and improving the soil. For all garden beds, reapply organic mulch as needed, based upon weather conditions and appearance.

## Good Bug



No, that is not a typo. There really are bugs that are [beneficial](#) to your yard and garden. But when it looks like insects are feasting on your plants, it's easy to rush out and buy a broad spectrum insecticide that will kill all the bugs that live in your landscape. While that might sound like a great idea, this practice could actually make your insect problem worse. When all bugs in an area are killed, it opens the door for other insects to move in and potentially cause even more damage to your plants. Nature already has a check and balance system in place; using that system to your benefit is called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). "Good" insects hunt and eat many "bad" insects that plague residential landscapes. Knowing how to identify beneficial insects and incorporating ways to help them thrive, such as by installing plants that they prefer, will attract them to your landscape and provide your plants with an opportunity for a long term defense against pests. If the damage caused by insects is such that you must resort to chemical insecticides, first identify the offenders. The AL Cooperative Extension's [Plant Diagnostic Center](#), located at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, can help. Purchase the [least toxic](#)

[treatment](#) that specifically targets that insect, use only the amount and frequency recommended on the label, and be aware of the potential dangers of using, storing and properly disposing of the chemical.

## What's Happening

**Tree Seedling Giveaway - February 21** - 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.

**8th Annual Valley Creek Cleanup - March 3, 10, 17** - Save the dates! The Valley Creek Cleanup will be held at 10 locations during March. Bags and gloves will be provided; a hot dog lunch will be served to volunteers after the cleanups. Community service hours are available. Call 325-8741 to learn more!

## Really???



If you have ever seen someone intentionally toss trash out of a car while driving through YOUR neighborhood, this photo is probably disturbing. One way Jefferson County residents are addressing this problem is by taking part in a roadside litter cleanup. It's a great way to create a sense of community pride and join your neighbors in addressing a common goal. Last year, Jefferson County provided materials and support to 1534 volunteers who removed nearly 60 tons of litter and trash from more than 215 miles of County maintained roadways. Many of our volunteers told us that participating in a cleanup was very gratifying but also very frustrating since it addresses a problem that should never have occurred in the first place. While some littering is accidental, the majority is a choice because we each have complete control over our [behaviors](#) related to disposing of trash. Every gas station, fast food restaurant, and convenience store has easily accessible trash receptacles. So with many convenient ways to properly dispose of trash, why do people litter? Here is what the experts say: People litter (1) because they do not feel responsible for public areas like streets and parks; (2) outside their own

neighborhood where their trash becomes someone else's problem; (3) because they believe someone else will pick up after them. Once litter starts to pile up, people feel even less responsible for adding to the litter. BUT if an area is clean, people are less likely to litter. Educating people about the [negative effects](#) of littering such as driving hazards, declining property values, and environmental pollution and then motivating them to stop littering seems like a daunting task. But the more this is the topic of conversation and common point of action for our communities, schools, places of worship, and households, the greater chance we have of keeping our communities clean. Consider organizing a cleanup or requesting a speaker for your community, school, or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County to learn how you can get involved and make a difference. For [information](#), call Jefferson County's Stormwater Program at 325-8741.

## Shady Characters



If you like to garden, you probably have been planning for months what you will purchase and plant in your yard this spring. Visions of sun filled flower beds bursting with color probably come to mind. One often overlooked option is to install a garden in an area of the yard that usually doesn't get much attention: [a shady area](#), like under the tree canopy or next to the house. These often neglected areas have the potential to become one of the most lovely, attention grabbing locations in your landscape. Shade loving [plants](#) include a much bigger cast of characters than just ferns and other greenery. Many boast colorful foliage, but some also feature flowers for great unexpected garden color. Some native plants to consider in our region include bleeding heart, caladium, cardinal flower, coral bells, foamflower, fox glove, hellebores, hosta, hydrangea, white trillium, wood hyacinth, and woodland phlox. While all plants need some attention, choosing natives will reduce the need for watering and fertilizing since these plants are already adapted to our area's soil, rainfall and temperature.

The addition of plants into an area usually left empty also can improve rainwater infiltration on your property. Consider adding a stormwater friendly path made from pavers or gravel, and don't forget to incorporate a place to sit and linger in your beautiful new shade garden.

## Watershed Spotlight



You might already have picked up a FREE 2018 stormwater calendar from Jefferson County Development Services Department in Room 260 of the downtown courthouse. The calendar highlights venues in Jefferson County that are fun places to visit but which are also playing a big role in contributing to improving our [watersheds](#) and water quality. The venues featured in the winter/spring portion of the 2018 calendar are located in the Shades Creek and Cahaba River Watersheds. January features the [Homewood Forest Preserve](#), a beautiful 6 acre pocket of forest habitat located in the midst of Homewood, rich with wildlife and part of the Red Rock Trail System. February highlights [Red Mountain Park](#), which includes 1500 acres of forest and stream habitats as well as trails, zip lines, and historic sites to explore. March focuses on the [Cahaba River](#) at [Grant's Mill Road](#), which boasts a canoe/kayak launch and hiking trails in a beautiful setting perfect for fishing and swimming. Consider visiting and enjoying these great outdoor locations!

**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@jccal.org](mailto:lyn.diclemente@jccal.org) or call 325.8741.*