

YOUR GARDENING PRACTICES AFFECT THE WATER QUALITY OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

By Amy Rembold Frederick County Master Gardener, June 2023

“Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you.”—Wendell Berry, American novelist and environmental activist. Did you ever think that the way you use water and chemicals up here in Frederick County affects the quality of water in the Chesapeake Bay?

It is easy to believe that what we do here in Frederick County does not affect the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay, as it takes us about an hour to drive to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge from Frederick; however, every creek, stream, and river in Frederick County is part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, meaning that what is running off our landscapes—pesticides, fertilizers, erosion, and many more—eventually reaches the Bay.



In 2022, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation released its biannual record card of the Chesapeake Bay, and the score was a D+; no change from the last report. Some scores went up, while others went down. For example, in 2022, the Bay-wide crab dredge was the lowest it has been in its 33-year history. The price of crabs last summer was high, and most of the crabs were not coming from the Bay due to moratoriums on harvest.



Although this may all seem dismal, there are many ways that you as a gardener can change your practices and help the water quality of our watershed.

First, just observe your landscape after a rainstorm. Do you see water moving down into the street or storm drain? Think of ways you could slow this water, such as moving a downspout's direction with extenders or creating a rain garden with native plants, so that the water has time to



soak back into the ground and not into the street.

Second, think of your landscape as a habitat. When you look across your yard, are you only seeing green? Grass is a monoculture that provides no nutrition to pollinators or insects, and without insects, the birds have nothing to feed themselves or their babies. The root system of grass is so shallow that it does not provide the deep root systems that native plants do. Remember the stories about the “dust bowl” of the 1930s?? Also, think about the amount of time (mowing, weed-whacking), money (chemicals), and water that we use to have that perfect green space. The alternative, adding native plants, can provide color, requires little to no fertilizers, and when established is considerably cheaper, less work, and provides the habitats that our native insects and birds need to survive.

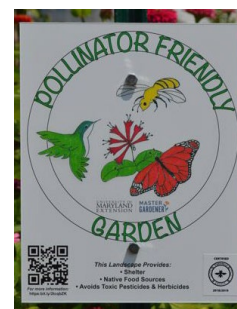
Third, you don't have to get rid of all your grass landscape. There are ways to help the Bay: by cutting your grass less often, setting your lawn mower blade higher so your grass grows taller, and replacing small areas that are hard to mow with native plots, you are well on your way to helping the Bay.

We all feel that we are judged by how our gardens/landscape look and that we must follow the guidelines set by our neighbors, community, and HOAs. However, in October 2021, the Maryland Senate passed House Bill 322, which compels HOAs and other organizations to allow “low-impact landscaping” such as rain gardens, native plant gardens, pollinator gardens and xeriscaping in subdivisions. It forbids HOAs to require “cultivated vegetation consisting whole or in part of turf grass.”

Sometimes the best way to let neighbors know about your lawn and garden eco-friendly practices is through a sign in your yard.



The Frederick County Master Gardeners offers Bay Wise and Pollinator certification programs. The Bay-Wise Certification is for both landscapes and vegetable gardens and shows that your garden practices help promote the water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Pollinator Certification indicates you are providing the necessary habitat in your garden for pollinators to have food, water and shelter. Even if you are not interested in the certification, the applications have many ideas to help you do your part in protecting the Bay.



For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, get applications for both the Bay-Wise and the Pollinator certifications, gardening information and advice visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Also upcoming free seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, gardening information, advice, and publications (some in Spanish), as well as other announcements, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland> . UME Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center> .

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