



April 2012

Earth Day, Earth Month, and a Greener Planet

By Karen Mayne

Are you old enough to remember the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970? If not, then you are young enough to know that now the entire month of April is designated as Earth Month. You don't need to try to save the entire planet, though. There are lots of things we can all do at home to help keep the Earth clean and green. If each of us takes little steps during Earth Month . . . and every month of the year . . . we will truly have a greener planet!

Nothing but rain down the storm drain. All storm drains in Norfolk empty into local waterways. So any leaves and grass clippings that get swept into the street or oil that is poured into the drains will end up in our rivers. If you see a sewer overflow in the street or a yard, call the City Department of Utilities emergency number at 823-1000.

Scoop the Poop! Pet wastes are a leading source of bacterial contamination of the Lafayette River. Pick up after your dogs when you walk them, and train your pets to use one specific area of your yard so that you can clean up easily and toss it in the trash.

Kick the fertilizer habit. Have your soil tested through the Norfolk office of the Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension Service (683-2816) to determine the health of your soil before applying fertilizer. Use compost as the preferred way to improve the soil, and let grass clippings stay on the grass. If you do fertilize, fertilize fescue grass in the fall and zoysia/St. Augustine lawns in the summer. Follow manufacturer's instructions for watering in, and don't fertilize if heavy rain is in the forecast.

Don't feed the geese and ducks. If we don't feed them, they will move elsewhere to look for food. If you live on the water, you can string fishing line like a fence along the waterfront to deter waterfowl from entering your yard. Better yet, let a buffer of native vegetation grow up along the shoreline to keep the waterfowl away.

Save Water. Fix dripping and leaky faucets and



toilets. Outdoors, install a rain barrel on your gutters to make use of free rainwater.

Change a Light Bulb. Replace one incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent bulb (CFL) to save energy and reduce the amount of pollutants generated by power plants.

Can the Grease. Don't pour grease or greasy food wastes down the drain. Grease is a major contributor to sewer clogs in our city. Pour grease into a can and refrigerate it before putting it in the trash. Wipe off frying pans and greasy plates with a paper towel before washing.

Don't Flush Medicines. The chemicals in our medicines cannot be removed at the sewage treatment plant and end up in waterways where they adversely affect aquatic life and humans. Find out if your pharmacy will take back unused medicines. Or, throw your medicine bottles in the trash after crossing out your personal information and adding used coffee grounds or other material to make the pills unusable.

Reduce Plastic Bags. Plastic bags are made out of petroleum and do not decompose. Switch to reusable cloth bags.

Become a River Star Home. Join your neighbors and show your support for cleaning up the Elizabeth and Lafayette Rivers by displaying the River Star Home flag. Call the Elizabeth River Project at 757-399-7487 or visit their website at www.elizabethriver.org for information on joining the %home team.+

Karen can be reached by e-mail at KarenLMayne@aol.com or by phone at 587-1287