

5. Carefully store & dispose of household cleaners, chemicals, & oil.

Did you know that many household products are dangerous to our kids, pets, and the environment? These materials pollute our waterways if washed or dumped into storm drains or roadside ditches.

Identify it. Be aware of household products that can harm kids, pets, and the environment. The words “danger,” “caution,” or “toxic” indicate that you need to be careful in how you use and dispose of the product.

Less is better.

Reduce waste and save money by purchasing only the materials you need. When possible, choose less toxic alternatives. For example, try cleaning your windows with vinegar and water.



Store properly.

Keep unused products in their original containers with label intact. Select cool, dry storage areas that are away from kids, pets, and wildlife.

Disposal is key. Never dump motor oil, chemicals, and other toxic materials down storm drains, sinks, or on the ground. Contact your local community for disposal locations, guidelines, and dates.

7. Keep pollution out of storm drains.

Storm drains and roadside ditches lead to our lakes and streams. So, any oil, pet waste, leaves, or dirty water from washing your car or other outside activities that enters a storm drain gets into our lakes and streams.

Sweep it. Do you have extra fertilizers, grass clippings, or dirt on your driveway? Sweep it back onto your lawn. Hosing your driveway sends the pollutants into storm drains that lead to our lake and rivers.



Keep it clean. Whether in the street or in your yard, remember to keep leaves, grass clippings, trash, and fertilizers away from storm drains.

Only rain in the drain. Never dump motor oil, chemicals, pet waste, dirty or soapy water, or anything else down the storm drain. Once down the storm drain, all of these materials pollute our lakes and rivers!

Label it. Volunteer to label storm drains in your neighborhood to inform residents that they flow directly to our lakes and streams. Encourage friends and neighbors to contact their local community for more information on storm drain stenciling programs.

6. Choose earth-friendly landscaping.

Did you know you can protect your kids, pets, and the environment from the harmful effects of herbicides and pesticides by choosing earth-friendly landscaping? The chemicals in herbicides and pesticides pollute our waterways if washed from our lawns and gardens into storm drains and roadside ditches.

Go native. Select plants native to Michigan. Native plants are better able to tolerate Michigan’s climate, require less fertilizer and water, and are more disease resistant.

Variety is the spice of life. Use a wide variety of plants to help control pests and minimize the need for pesticides.

Water wisely. Lawns need about one inch of water per week. Use a rain gauge and water only when necessary, instead of on a fixed schedule.

Use mulch. Place a thick layer of mulch (e.g., 4 inches) around trees and plants. This helps retain water, reduce weeds, and minimizes the need for pesticides. Make your lawn cheaper and easier to maintain by mowing high - 3 inches is the rule! Tall grass promotes root growth and shades out weeds. Let grass clippings fall back on the lawn. Clippings recycle nutrients back into the soil, so fertilizer needs can be reduced by 25% or more!



Rake it or leave it. Follow your community’s leaf pick-up guidelines. Avoid raking leaves into storm drains or roadside ditches. Try mowing leaves into your lawn - they also make a good fertilizer!

Use less for pests. Use pesticides and herbicides sparingly. Limit application of these chemicals to problem areas only.



Seven simple steps to clean water

1. Help keep pollution out of storm drains.
2. Fertilize sparingly and carefully.
3. Carefully store and dispose of household cleaners, chemicals, and oil.
4. Clean up after your pet.
5. Practice good car care.
6. Choose earth friendly landscaping.
7. Save water.

Let's make one thing
Perfectly Clear.
our water
Genesee County Community Water Quality Consortium



Remember, storm drains lead to our lakes and rivers!

1. Practice good car care.

Did you know there are over 4 million vehicles in Southeast Michigan? Practicing good car care helps protect our lakes and streams. How? Storm drains and roadside ditches lead to our lakes and streams. If dirty water from washing our cars or motor fluids are washed or dumped into the storm drain or roadside ditches, it pollutes our local waterways.

Make a date. Car wash facilities treat their dirty water before discharging it to our lakes and streams. So, make a date to take your car to a car wash.

Wash it on the grass. If you wash your car at home, consider washing it on the lawn. Or, if you can't use the lawn, try to direct the dirty water towards the lawn and away from the storm drain.

Minimize it. Reduce the amount of soap you use or wash your car with plain water.

Maintain it. Keep your vehicle properly tuned. Use the owner's manual to guide decisions about how often it is necessary to change fluids such as oil and antifreeze.

Take advantage of business expertise. Consider taking your vehicle to the shop to have the oil and other fluids changed. These businesses have the ability to recycle the used materials and clean up accidental spills.

Recycle. If you choose to change your oil and other fluids yourself, label the waste containers. Then, take them to your community's household hazardous waste collection day or to a business that accepts used oil. Never dump used oil, antifreeze, or other fluids on the ground or down the storm drain.



2. Fertilize sparingly & caringly.

Storm drains found in our streets and yards empty into our lakes and streams. So, when we fertilize our lawn we could also be fertilizing our lakes and streams. While fertilizer is good for our lawn, it's bad for our water. Fertilizer in our lakes and streams causes algae to grow. Algae can form large blooms and use oxygen that fish need to survive. With 1.5 million homes in Southeast Michigan, all of us need to be aware of the cumulative effects of our lawn care practices.

Sweep it. Fertilizer and grass clippings left on sidewalks and driveways wash into storm drains. So, save money – and our lakes and streams – by sweeping fertilizer and grass clippings back onto the lawn.

Hire smart. Select a lawn service that uses organic fertilizers or offers a slow-release nitrogen, low or no phosphorus option. Request a soil test to ensure the right amount is applied.

Don't guess, soil test. A soil test will tell you what, if any, fertilizer is needed in your yard. Contact your Michigan State University Extension county office for more information.

Buy low. Choose a fertilizer with low or no phosphorus. Most lawns already contain enough phosphorus. Excess phosphorus causes algae blooms in our lakes!

Go slow. Select an organic or slow-release fertilizer. Check the label. A slow-release fertilizer is one with at least half of the nitrogen in "water insoluble" form. Slow-release fertilizers provide a steady supply of plant nutrients over an extended period of time.

Make fertilizer-free zones. Keep fertilizer applications at least 20 feet away from the edge of lakes, streams, or storm drains.

3. Clean up after your pet.

Did you know that pet waste has bacteria that can make our lakes and rivers unsafe for swimming and other recreational activities? That happens when pet waste left on sidewalks or yards gets washed into storm drains or roadside ditches that lead directly to our lakes and rivers.

Prompt and proper disposal. Whether in your yard or on a walk, promptly dispose of your pet's waste in the trash or down the toilet where it will be properly treated. When pet waste is left behind, it washes into storm drains and ditches. From there it heads straight to your local lakes and rivers taking harmful bacteria with it.

Watch instead of feeding. Watch and enjoy the ducks and geese, but avoid feeding them. Feeding ducks and geese may seem harmless but, in fact, can be harmful to our water. Feeding waterfowl causes them to become more dependent on humans which, in turn, creates unnaturally high populations and more animal waste. This waste contains bacteria that pollutes our parks and lakes.



Spread the work. Tell others how they can help protect our lakes and rivers. Also, work cooperatively with your local government to install signs, bag dispensers, and trash cans in convenient public places to remind visitors to clean up after their pets.

4. Save water.

When we over water our lawns, the excess water carries pollution into storm drains and ditches that lead directly to our rivers and lakes. In fact, did you know that each of us uses 77 gallons of water a day?

Water wisely. Generally, your lawn needs about an inch of water a week. Over watering lawns results in shallow-rooted plants that are less tolerant of heat and drought, and more prone to disease. Avoid over watering by using a rain gauge and watering only when necessary, instead of on a fixed schedule.

Improve your aim. Adjust your sprinklers to water only your lawn and plants – not your driveway, sidewalk, or street.

Use mulch. Place a thick layer of mulch (e.g., 4 inches) around trees and plants. This helps retain water, reduce weeds, and minimize the need for pesticides.

Sweep it. Clean sidewalks and driveways with a broom, instead of a hose. You'll save water and keep unwanted pollutants out of the storm drain.

Put rainwater to work. Use rainwater to water your plants. Direct downspouts toward your plants and green areas or collect water with rain barrels for use later.

Mow high. Make your lawn cheaper and easier to maintain by mowing high (3 inches is the rule) Tall grass promotes root growth and shades out weeds. Let grass clippings fall back on the lawn. Clippings recycle nutrients back into the soil, so fertilizer needs can be reduced by 25% or more!

Rake it or leave it. Follow your community's leaf pick-up guidelines. Avoid raking leaves into storm drains or roadside ditches. Try mowing leaves into your lawn - they also make a good fertilizer!

Use less for pests. Use pesticides and herbicides sparingly. Limit application of these chemicals to problem areas only.

Remember, it all drains to our lakes and rivers!

