

NEWS

8 simple things YOU can do to restore the Susquehanna River and save the Chesapeake Bay

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Restoring the Susquehanna watershed and saving the Chesapeake Bay might seem like a huge task, involving big projects — from stream restoration, to updating wastewater treatment systems, to mitigating the damage caused by mine discharges, to changing farming practices.

But there are some simple things that you can do to contribute to the effort. They may seem like little things, but if enough people adopt the practices, environmentalists believe they can have a large impact.

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Have the worst lawn in the neighborhood

Use less fertilizer — or stop using it entirely. Certainly, everyone wants to have a nice, lush lawn, but commercial fertilizers contain nitrogen and phosphorus, major sources of pollution to the river watershed and the bay. The compounds run off into drains during rainstorms, and the chemicals flow downstream to the river and the bay.

Save rainwater

Build or buy a rain barrel and save that rain to water your lawn or garden. That way, storm

water has a better chance of being absorbed than running off. Or, build what's known as a rain garden in your yard — lush native-plant gardens that absorb rain water and/or filter it. Think of it as having your own wetland.

Scoop the poop

Dog feces contains a lot of the same nutrients that pollute the watershed, in addition to harmful bacteria and worms and other biohazards. As a benefit, you don't have to worry about scraping it off your shoes after mowing the lawn.

Drive less

In addition to help with air quality, driving less results in fewer emissions that contribute to a third of the excess nitrogen flushed into the bay every year. Consolidate trips, carpool, use public transit or bike or walk when you can.

Sit in the dark

Turn off the lights and conserve electricity. Power plant emissions are also a source of nitrogen pollution, so the less electricity you use, the fewer emissions are spewed into the atmosphere.

Don't dump stuff you shouldn't

It may be obvious, but properly dispose of used motor oil, antifreeze, paint and household cleaners. And don't flush unused prescription drugs down the toilet. Many wastewater treatment plants cannot filter out compounds in the drugs and they wind up in the river, harming wildlife, which, in turn, harms water quality. Your local waste management service can provide information about proper disposal of such materials.

Don't litter

A lot of litter washes downstream and winds up in the bay. So pick up litter and keep trash out of the bay. It's not just aesthetic. Litter contains toxic chemicals that endanger and poison fish that might wind up on our dinner tables.

Make a call — or two

Contact your local, state and federal representatives and let them know that you support policies that contribute to a clean environment.

Sources: The Maryland Department of the Environment and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.