

SOS **Safeguarding Our Streams** **A Citizen's Guide**

Our Borough of Mechanicsburg is part of the great Chesapeake Bay water shed. Trindle Spring, Cedar Run and the nearby Silver Spring are urban waterways in this vast ecosystem. Eventually all our streams flow to the sea and on their way hit the Chesapeake Bay.

The following is a guide to seven ways you can help protect this valuable watershed by slowing the speed of water off your property, by providing more porous surfaces and by reducing the amount of pollutants in the waterways.

The Magnificent Seven

1. Don't just sit there—plant a tree, Lee!

Planting trees anywhere helps streams everywhere. A mature tree's massive network of leaves slows rainfall during a storm, reducing the speed that raindrops hit the ground and slowing the erosion of soil into streams. Also, trees absorb rain like sponges, and leaves drip rainfall onto the ground for hours after a storm, giving more water a chance to seep underground. A tree's roots hold the soil and keep soil from washing into streams.

If you're fortunate enough to live along a stream, plant trees and shrubs along the water to slow runoff and reduce pollutants washing into the stream. Shade trees keep the stream cooler, increase the amount of oxygen in the water, and encourage clean-stream life.

2. Go porous, Delores!

The large amount of black top or paved surfaces in suburban landscapes is the most significant problem facing local streams. Reducing the amount of non-porous surface on your property provides immense relief to streams. Consider walkways made from gravel or concrete lattice, surfaces that allow rainfall to trickle through. How about a patio made from loose slate with gravel between the rocks? Building a tennis court? Ask your contractor about new porous materials that allow rain to soak through.

3. Spout off and roll out the barrel, Darrell.

Rain flows down rooftops into gutters and downspouts and then gushes onto driveways on its way to the storm drains. Redirect your house's downspouts to flow not down the driveway or street, but into lawn or garden. To further slow water down and save money on your water bill, consider an old fashioned remedy—the trusty rain barrel. Place the barrel under a down spout to capture water for garden and lawn. If your rain barrel has no screen on top, a few goldfish in the barrel will keep it free of mosquito larvae. You'll have to supplement the fishes' diet from time to time and take them inside during the winter.

4. Don't be so dirty, Gerty!

Another huge suburban stream problem is sediment—soil and sand washed into streams from private property. Storms wash these materials into streams from gardens, sparse lawns, construction sites, and home improvement projects like pool installations and house additions. Protect soil every way you can. Keep bare earth covered by grass or flowerbeds. During projects, cover bare soil with mulch or hay. Keep suds from car washing and animal waste from getting into the storm drains.

5. Easy on the chems, Clem!

Chemicals we spray or place on our lawns and gardens—weed killers, fertilizers, pesticides—run into streams through storm water. Pesticides kill stream creatures and fertilizers stimulate algae growth. Carefully read all labels on these materials and apply the chemicals conservatively. Listen to weather reports to refrain from applying just before a storm. Consider less noxious brands of pesticides and weed killers and use a soil test kit to first determine if your soil needs fertilizer. Finally, take advantage of the wide variety of organic practices available to maintain a chemical free landscape. If you have a pool, don't allow pool chemicals to be flushed into the street.

6. Make a garden, Arden!

Gardens and flowerbeds slow rainfall far better than do lawns. Capture more rainfall by replacing portions of lawn in corners and edges with flowerbeds or shrubs—you'll have less lawn to mow. As you plant, consider native shrubs and perennials—they demand less water than ornamentals. Digging a shallow ditch around your garden will help prevent soil runoff, help the garden to soak up rain water and will collect organic debris you can put back on your garden.

7. Mow easy and leave some leaves, Jeeves!

A close-cut, well manicured lawn looks stunning, but it allows storm water to flow across it too quickly. Consider maintaining grass at a height of at least four inches—this height slows the growth of weeds while better absorbing stormwater. Refrain from raking autumn's leaves from every corner of the property. Leave some leaves to form natural mulch to soak storm water like a sponge.

Our waterways have been good to us—now, return the favor!

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