



# Washtenaw County Conservation District

SEPTEMBER 2018

## Do Your Part and Get SepticSmart!

By the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - in conjunction with federal, state and local governments, and private sector partners - will kick off its sixth annual SepticSmart Week to encourage American homeowners and communities to properly maintain their septic systems [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic).

Michigan has a vision to protect and promote the wise use of its globally unique water resources. This vision is outlined in the Strategy for Sustaining Michigan's Water Heritage (Water Strategy) [www.michigan.gov/waterstrategy](http://www.michigan.gov/waterstrategy). Within the Water Strategy, a key recommendation is to ensure clean and safe water through passing a statewide sanitary code.

More than 1.3 million homes and businesses in Michigan depend on septic systems to treat

wastewater. If not maintained, failing septic systems can contaminate groundwater and harm the environment by releasing bacteria, viruses, and household toxics to local waterways. Proper septic system maintenance protects public health, the environment, and saves the homeowner money through avoided costly repairs.

### Simple tips for homeowners:

**Protect It and Inspect It:** Homeowners should generally have their system inspected every three years by a qualified professional or according to their state or local health department's recommendations. Tanks should be pumped every three to five years.

**Think at the Sink:** Avoid pouring fats, grease, and solids down the drain.

These substances can clog a system's pipes and drainfield.

**Don't Overload the Commode:** Only put things in the drain or toilet that belong there. For example, coffee grounds, dental floss, disposable diapers and wipes, feminine hygiene products, cigarette butts, and cat litter can all clog and potentially damage septic systems.

**Don't Strain Your Drain:** Be water-efficient and spread out water use. Fix plumbing leaks and install faucet aerators and water-efficient products. Spread out laundry and dishwasher loads throughout the day - too much water at once can overload a system that hasn't been pumped recently.

**Shield Your Field:** Remind guests not to park or drive on a system's drainfield,

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## Our Staff and Board Directors

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*"We must come to understand our past, our history, in terms of the soil and water and forests and grasses that have made it what it is."*

- William Vogt,  
Road to Survival,  
1948

## Tips for Fall Soil Care

By Megan DeLeeuw

Whether you are a backyard gardener, crop farmer, small farmer or homesteader—strategies for winter soil care are virtually the same. Take time to ensure your soil is protected for Michigan winter!

- Protect your soil from erosion and runoff by covering it.
  - **Establish a cover crop:** It's not too late to seed certain cover crops! 1) Identify your cover crop goal (winter kill or growth in spring?). 2) Select the right seed. Winter rye can be seeded late—often in late September or October. Rye is tough and will hold soil in place, resuming growth next spring. Alternatively, a mix of oat and peas can be seeded a bit earlier (usually mid-August to allow for enough growth) and will winterkill, creating a nice mulch over the cold months. There are many options available depending on area, seeding tools/strategies and crop plan. If you are a farmer, simple cost share options for cover crop seed are available. Cover crop seed payments can be from \$26-\$50/acre. Contact us for more information.
  - **Leave residue:** After harvesting your crop, leave residue instead of tilling in. Soybean material breaks down easily the next season. Corn residue can be no-till planted or tilled in to plant in the spring. Cost share for farmers is also available for this practice and amount varies.
  - **Mulch:** If not growing your own mulch (from winter kill cover crops), and you are on a smaller scale: you can use straw, leaves or other carbon based materials. Beds can be raked back and planted in without till.
  - **Test your soil:** Fall is a great time to evaluate soil nutrients. If you are a farmer interested in MAEAP, you are eligible for free field soil sampling. For backyard and garden testing MSUE has home garden soil test kits available for \$25 (705 N. Zeeb Road).

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## One Week Left to Order Fall Trees and Bulbs By Megan DeLeeuw

The countdown is underway for our fall tree and bulb sale! Orders are due Friday, September 21st . Pick up will be on Saturday, October 13th at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds (5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd, Ann Arbor) Pick up will be from 10 am -2 pm.

This fall's selection will include: a variety of conifer transplants (available singly or in bundles of 10). We will also offer a selection of bulbs, and planting aids (tree stakes, shelters, weed mats, etc). Order on our website ([www.washtenawcd.org](http://www.washtenawcd.org)), send in or drop off an order form with payment.



White Spruce



Norway Spruce



White Pine



Balsam Fir



White Cedar



Nick Machinski discusses importance of proper fuel storage



Farm Tour group at Rochowiak Farm



Frank Rochowiak discussing benefits of cover cropping for increased harvest

## MAEAP Updates from the Field By Nick Machinski

While I do not have any verifications to report for this issue, that doesn't mean it hasn't been busy for MAEAP. Late summer is when farmers have a little bit more time on their hands and that means things get busy for me. So, I have been in the field a lot lately, meeting with several farmers who are just getting started in MAEAP as well as a few who are close to becoming verified. In addition to field visits, the following events were held:

On August 14th, we held a well water testing event here in the office where people could bring in small samples of their well water to get tested for nitrates and nitrites. We had 15 people bring in their samples as well as several others asking if we are going to be doing another one in the future. I am unsure of the date yet, but we are planning to conduct another well water testing event in the coming months. Rest assured the details will be included in this newsletter once a date has been picked.

On August 28th, the Washtenaw County Conservation District hosted a MAEAP tour. A total of 26 people attended the event which showcased three different farms in the county. Those farms included: Selter Farms, Rochowiak Farms as well as Zilke Vegetable Farm. All three of these farms have been verified as well as re-verified, showing their commitment to the environment. We toured farmsteads, learned about cover crops the PA 116 program as well as what it takes to get verified in MAEAP. The group then enjoyed a nice dinner catered by Zilke Farm Kitchen in Milan. I want to thank all three of those farms as well as the farm kitchen for participating in the tour and for being excellent examples in the farming community.

That's it for me. I'm off to the field to collect some soil samples.

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## Are you farming in Saline River Sub-watershed?

By Megan DeLeeuw

The Washtenaw County Conservation District is working on a non-source pollution grant through the DEQ to help decrease sediment runoff within the critical Western Lake Erie Basin. We are looking for farmers in the **Saline River Sub-watershed** to participate in conservation programs and/or conservation focused workshops in starting in Summer of 2019. Freedom, Lodi, Saline, York and Augusta townships are all at least partially located within our target area. If you are interested in learning more or know of an interested farmer, please contact us at 734.718.5506 or [megan.deleeuw@macd.org](mailto:megan.deleeuw@macd.org).

## Invasive Species of the Month:

### Parrot Feather

By Dr. Shikha Singh, JWL CISMA Coordinator



Parrot feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) is an aquatic invasive species that is listed on the Michigan "invasive species watch list". It can find its way into local rivers, streams, lakes and ponds via fish tanks being dumped into water bodies. They reproduce asexually, and small pieces of the plant can break off and grow 3+ feet, and can reach one foot out of water! It can out compete native aquatic species, form dense mats (provides habitat for mosquito larvae, can impede boats and impact recreation). If found, take a picture and contact us ([shikha.singh@macd.org](mailto:shikha.singh@macd.org); (517) 395 - 2089) or contact the DEQ at (517) 284 - 5593.

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where the vehicle's weight could damage buried pipes or disrupt underground flow.

**Pump your Tank:** Routinely pumping your tank can prevent your septic system from premature failure, which can lead to groundwater contamination.

**Test Your Drinking Water Well:** If septic systems aren't properly maintained, leaks can contaminate well water. Testing your drinking water well is the best way to ensure your well water is free from contaminants.

For more information or questions on septic care, contact the Washtenaw County Conservation District at 734.761.6721 or [megan.deleeuw@macd.org](mailto:megan.deleeuw@macd.org).

## WCCD Calendar

**September 18:** Tall Ship Sail in Lake Erie

**September 21:** Deadline for Fall Sale

**October 13:** 10am-2pm: Fall Tree Sale

**January 10, 2019:** WCCD Annual Meeting

**April 26th & 27th 2019:** Spring Tree Sale

**June 1, 2019:** Native Plant Expo & Marketplace

**June 1, 2019:** Fish Distribution Day

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