

Runoff 101

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It's the No. 1 source of pollution to your local river and the Bay, and it's coming from your property. Find out what's washing off your yard and how to stop it.

For decades, pollution to the Chesapeake and surrounding rivers was easy to spot. Pipes from factories and sewage plants dumped wastewater teeming with nutrients and toxins directly into waterways. Thankfully, laws crafted in the 1970s have greatly reduced these “point source” polluters.

Today, most of the pollution to the Bay and local rivers is from “non-point sources,” or places like farms, yards, streets and parking lots where pollution washes off the land and runs into the nearest waterway or storm drain. Without any form of treatment, this “runoff” causes some big problems.

What washes off our lawns, sidewalks and driveways every time it rains ? Here's a list, along with the negative impacts they can have on our local waterways and the Chesapeake :

- Pet waste -- harbors bacteria, viruses and parasites harmful to aquatic life.
- Fertilizer -- contains [nutrients](#) that fuel the growth of algal blooms and reduce water clarity.
- Pesticides -- can cause deformities in [frogs, toads and salamanders](#).
- Soaps -- can kill aquatic microorganisms.
- Oil and engine fluids -- contain chemicals toxic to fish and other animals.
- [Sediment](#) -- smothers aquatic life and clouds the water, inhibiting the growth of [underwater grasses](#).

Ways to stop pollutants from running off your property range from simple behavior changes to large-scale landscaping alterations. Here are several things you can do, depending on your situation:

- [Build a buffer](#): Planting trees and shrubs will absorb water as it runs off your property, rather than rushing towards a drainage ditch or storm drain.
- [Pick up after your pooch](#): Dogs add many thousands of pounds of solid waste to lawns and streets everyday. Dropping it in a trash can or toilet instead cuts down on bacteria that would otherwise wash into our waterways.
- [Wash the car on the lawn](#): Let the ground filter out soap and grime from your car instead of sending it down the driveway and into a storm drain.
- [Fix the leaks!](#) Nobody wants antifreeze or 10 W 30 washing into their local creek, but that's where it will go after rain washes it from your driveway.

- [Fertilize Properly](#): Nutrients are the biggest headache for the Bay, and the main ingredient of your lawn fertilizer.
- [Install a Rain Barrel](#): These simple storage tanks let you capture rain water for plants and savings on your water bill.

Get more runoff reduction tips at these sites:

- [Know Your Nitrogen](#): A guide to reducing Nitrogen Pollution at Home
- [Better Backyard](#): A Citizen's Resource Guide to Beneficial Landscaping and Habitat Restoration in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- [Bayscape your yard](#) – From the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay .