



# JEFFCO H<sub>2</sub>O NEWS

ISSUE 10 - WINTER SPRING 2015

*A Test You Can't Fail! | What's Happening? | The Bare Naked Truth | Turn Up the Heat | The Allure of More*

## A Test You Can't Fail!

**"SPREAD" THE WORD!**

1. PUT SOIL INTO BAG    2. MAIL AS INSTRUCTED    3. FOLLOW TEST RESULTS

**TEST YOUR SOIL BEFORE YOU BUY**  
APPLY THE CORRECT PRODUCT IN APPROPRIATE AMOUNTS  
IT'S EASY TO APPLY TOO MUCH FERTILIZER WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY NEED.  
ANY EXCESS JUST GETS WASHED OFF BY RAINFALL OR IRRIGATION AND POLLUTES OUR WATERWAYS.  
REPORT SUSPECTED WATER POLLUTION, CALL 325-5792

StormH<sub>2</sub>O   Birmingham Barbershop   Birmingham Botanical Gardens   Keep Birmingham Beautiful Commission   ALABAMA FORESTRY INDUSTRY

If the thought of taking a test makes you break out into a cold sweat, take a deep breath and read on! The only way you can fail this one is if you don't take it. Maybe you apply some sort of fertilizer to your lawn or garden every spring because the commercials on TV extoll its importance, or because your neighbors are putting fertilizer on their yards. Before you rush to the store, doesn't it make sense to first find out if your soil needs these nutrients, and if so, what kind and how much? Rather than wasting money guessing, you can purchase a soil test kit from your local lawn and garden store, or pick up a free kit from the nearest Alabama Cooperative Extension System office and have your [soil sample analyzed](#) by Auburn University for \$7. If the soil test recommends adjusting soil pH, applying lime may be recommended. If the test suggests adding nutrients, you will need to purchase the right kind of fertilizer for your yard. First look for those three little numbers on the fertilizer bag. These tell you the percentage of each of the three elements - nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium - that are included in the product. The [results of the soil test](#) will indicate how much of each of these elements should be added to the soil to achieve the proper nutrient levels. The remainder of the product is a filler which allows the fertilizer to be spread at the application rate recommended in the package directions. You can set the application rate of your spreader by adjusting its dial to the number specified. The fertilizer package also indicates how many square feet the product will cover. (Don't forget to subtract any paved areas from the total when calculating the size of your yard.) Remember not to apply right before or during a rain and to sweep up any product that falls on paved areas. Like anything else, rain will wash fertilizer into the storm drainage system and carry it to the nearest stream or creek. Using the right amount of the right nutrients at the right time will save you money as well as maximize your yard's ability to fight off pests and diseases while looking its best.

## What's Happening?

**Birmingham Annual Plant Dig, February 14** - Grab your garden tools, gloves and containers, and head to the New Georgia Landfill (2800 47th Street North, Birmingham) from 10 am to 2 pm to stock up on FREE plants for your yard. Call 787-5222 to learn more.

**Urban Forestry Fair, February 26** - Come on out to Linn Park (between the downtown Courthouse and Birmingham City Hall) from 9 am to 2 pm to receive FREE tree seedlings ready for planting. Sponsored by the National Resources Conservation Service and the Alabama Forestry Commission.

**Cherry Blossom Festival, March 21** - Japan-America Society of Alabama's Annual Cherry Blossom Festival, 11 am to 4 pm, Japanese Gardens, Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Free admission.

## The Bare Naked Truth



One good thing about brown grass, leafless trees, and sparse garden beds is the chance they provide to really evaluate your landscape. This bareness can reveal the shape, balance and location of all the good (and sometimes not so good) elements of your yard. It also provides a chance to think about how you would like to enjoy your yard and if it currently is meeting those wishes. It's very possible that your needs or abilities have changed but your yard hasn't kept up with those changes. Maybe physical or time limitations mean that this year you would like to plan for a more maintenance free landscape. Or life changes such as children, pets, or retirement have inspired you to create a more functional space for play or relaxation. Whatever changes the new year is bringing to your life, winter is the perfect time to start thinking about what you want your landscape to become. Like most things in life, the best landscape designs start with a plan. A home [landscape planning guide](#) can help you organize your ideas and get started on [implementing a new vision](#) for your yard.

## Turn Up the Heat



Do you have a garden in a sunny area of your yard that is plagued with weeds and pesky fungi and bacteria that infect your plants? It's possible to avoid using yard chemicals and still get rid of these pests by relying on the [heat of the sun](#). This process is called soil solarization. First remove any plants and debris from the area, and till, level and smooth the soil surface. Water the soil until it is very saturated, about 12" deep into the soil. Cover the area with a heavy duty clear plastic tarp, and secure the edges with soil or rocks. The clear plastic and water will concentrate the sun's energy, trapping heat in the soil. The heat will kill weed seeds, insects, and many harmful fungi and bacteria. This process also speeds up the breakdown of organic material in the soil and promotes the repopulation of helpful worms, fungi and bacteria, leaving your soil in better shape than it began. During spring and fall, it will take about 6-8 weeks to eliminate soil pests. In summer, temperatures under the tarp can reach as high as 140 degrees, shortening the process to 4 to 6 weeks. When the time is up, carefully remove the tarp and start planting!

## The Allure of More



Let's face it - we all want to have the latest smart phone, tablet, laptop, game system and flat screen TV. Maybe you just got one of these items over the holidays. But our desire to be the first to own the latest greatest little gadget has resulted in a fast-growing surplus of electronic waste, or e-waste. The United States leads the world in producing e-waste, discarding about six billion pounds of it each year. Besides taking up a lot of space in landfills, e-waste contains dangerous chemicals and heavy metals which can pollute water and land. In the United States, an estimated 70% of heavy metals in landfills come from discarded electronics. These heavy metals, which include lead, cadmium, mercury and arsenic, can leach from landfills into the water table and pollute groundwater. Groundwater feeds springs and streams, which in turn flow into rivers and lakes. E-waste also contains as many as 60 elements, including valuable gold and platinum. These elements are not renewable, and recycling electronic devices provides opportunities for these materials to be recovered and reused, thereby conserving precious resources. So what should you do with unwanted electronics? If the electronic device is still usable, donating it to a charitable organization is a good option. However, if the electronic device is broken or otherwise not usable, take it to a business or recycling center that will properly dispose of it. Another great option is to bring your unwanted electronic devices to Birmingham's electronic recycling events held every April and October. In the meantime, you can visit [recycleAL.com](#) to learn about recycling opportunities near you.

**To report suspected water pollution in unincorporated Jefferson County, call 205.325.5792!**

*If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, or if you have questions or comments, please email [diclementel@jccal.org](mailto:diclementel@jccal.org) or call 205.325.8741.*