



Conservation Connection

Fall 2021

Staff Changes at Butler SWCD

This past August we said goodbye to Sean Hudson, our Water Resource Specialist, who accepted a teaching position at Miami University. We wish Sean the best of luck!

The District would like to extend a warm welcome to Ashlee Widener, our new Water Resource Specialist. Ashlee grew up in Lancaster, Ohio, a graduate of Lancaster High School. Having a fond interest in environmental issues led Ashlee to attend Ohio University. She received both her Undergraduate and Graduate degrees at OU, majoring in Marine, Freshwater, and Environmental Biology as well as Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. As a member of the Voinovich School she worked on a stream restoration project in Western Pennsylvania. After completing two internships with the Ohio EPA it was clear she wanted to work in water quality and freshwater ecology.



Ashlee looks forward to working with the watersheds in Butler County, getting to know the water quality of the watersheds, and working with others aimed at restoring and maintaining water quality.

Newsletter Sponsor Form

Looking to advertise your business? You can purchase advertisement space in our *Conservation Connection* newsletter. The space in our quarterly newsletter is approximately 2.5" x 2.5" in size. The price for the year is \$125. If you would like to sponsor an ad space, or you would like to continue to sponsor a space, please fill out the information below for one of the following options and return to our office by **Friday, January 7, 2022**.

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(Check One) _____ without any changes, or _____ with the following changes:

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Graphics will be included as space allows. Please send business card with this form.

Please send form and check payable to Butler SWCD, 1802 Princeton Road, Suite 300, Hamilton, Ohio 45011.

Inside this issue:

Lawn Fertilizer	2
Healthy Lawn & Clean Water	3
USDA Updates	4
H2Ohio Updates	4
Monarch Migration	5
Fall Planting for Monarchs	5
Illegal Dumping	6
2021 Butler SWCD Award Winners	6
Composting	6
BEST Volunteer	8
Forestry Workshop	8

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A Homeowner's Guide

Lawn Fertilizer

Kelly Crout, District Director



As summer fades to fall, lawns start going dormant, usually turning brown in color. This triggers most homeowner's to think about fertilizing their lawn prior to the start of winter. Most lawn care companies will suggest fertilizing multiple times in the fall. Looking at one Ohio company, Lawn Matters, they recommend two fertilizer applications in the spring; one in early spring and one in late spring before the weather gets too warm, and then two applications in the fall between August and November (www.lawnmatter.com).

While this is the lawn care industry's recommendation, does your yard really need **four** applications of fertilizer a year? The best way to determine what your lawn really needs is to have your soil tested. By taking the time to have your soil tested, you can determine where your soil (and lawn) is currently, and what nutrients and fertilizer rates you really need.

Why is the topic of lawn fertilizers so important? While nutrient runoff is primarily thought of as an agricultural issue, actually a study conducted by the US EPA's New England Regional laboratory found that when people apply fertilizer to lawns, an astonishing 40-60% of the nitrogen applied ends up in local surface and groundwater (*Washington Post*, 2015). An excess of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, which are found in lawn fertilizers, can lead to an increase in nutrients in our local streams and rivers. Eutrophication can be the result, which is when the nutrient load exceeds the natural process. The unwanted outcome is an increase in algal blooms, fish kills, and a costly endeavor to clean our water systems.

"Some algal blooms are harmful to humans because they produce elevated toxins and bacterial growth that can make people sick if they come into contact with polluted water, consume tainted fish or shellfish, or drink contaminated water." United State Environmental Protection Agency

In 2009 the EPA estimated that eutrophication costs \$2.2 billion per year in damages to our local water supplies,

making pollution from nutrients potentially one of the most costly environmental problems (*Washington Post*, 2015). Excessive fertilization, plus rain, creates a storm water cocktail that can be deadly for organisms in our streams and rivers.

The issue of nutrient runoff is especially important in late summer and in the fall months. As lawns and grass become dormant, this decreases the infiltration capacity of the soil. Ohio usually gets an increase in rainfall in the fall months, and with the lower infiltration rate, this can often times lead to an increase in runoff. Again, an increase in fertilizer and other nutrients will go into stormwater drains, ditches, and into our local streams and rivers.

While green lawns seem to be highly coveted and more eye appealing, the bigger question that homeowners should ask is "does my lawn really need fertilizer?" Here are some considerations before you get the fertilizer cart rolling:

- Have I had my soil tested?
- What nutrients and rates do I need based on my soil test results?
- Have I overwatered my yard?



Think about when to apply your fertilizer: what months and also what weather. If it calls for rain in the next 24 hours or high winds, then don't apply. The stormwater runoff from lawns and lots will flow into storm drains, leading straight to local streams and resulting in high levels of nutrients. Overwatering yards can also cause serious problems. It is recommended you use a soaker hose, a porous hose that releases water directly into the ground, which can also reduce overwatering which can carry fertilizers into our storm drains.

Taking these steps allows you to have a great lawn, while helping limit nutrient runoff in your local watershed.

For further information on the nature of soils in general, visit the Butler SWCD website at www.butlerswcd.org/soil. And for information on how to test the soil in your yard, please contact the Butler County OSU Extension office by calling (513) 887-3722.

Fall Tips

Healthy Lawn and Clean Water

Lynn White, Education & Volunteer Specialist

As the temperature begins to drop and the days become shorter, perhaps the last thing on your mind is yard work. Winter is right around the corner, so now is a great time to prepare your yard before the cold and wet months. Here are some tips from Butler Soil and Water Conservation District to ensure a healthy lawn for next year.



Leaf Management: It may be tempting to let the colorful leaves stay on your lawn for awhile, but if you want a healthy yard, it is important to prevent them from smothering your lawn as this can lead to long-term grass damage. It is also important to prevent leaves from entering nearby stormwater drains, ditches, and culverts. When leaves enter the stormwater drainage system, they can clog pipes or be carried directly to the nearest stream or river. There they will decompose, using up available oxygen in the water and release nutrients into the waterbody, promoting algae growth in the warmer months.

The simplest solution, depending upon the quantity of leaves, is to chop them with the mower and allow them to decompose into your lawn. This adds free nutrients back to your soil. If you have a lot of leaves in your yard, you may want to mulch or rake some of them up. You may also want to check if your municipality has leaf collection services. If you rake them, think about using the leaves to cover your gardens over winter, or add them to compost as they are a great source of carbon. The leaves can also be a home to many species of insects in your garden.

If you choose to leave some undisturbed leaves in garden beds, they may become a home to butterfly chrysalis or ladybugs. Ladybugs are notorious pest eaters, each one consuming dozens of soft-bodied pest insects and insect eggs every day. Leaving the garden intact for the winter means you'll get a jump start on controlling pests in the spring.

In some subdivisions, you might get a few comments about your garden or lawn looking too "natural" or a little too shabby. If that is the case, clean-up your front yard and let

the beneficial insects enjoy the backyard. Or, install a small sign explaining that your garden bed and lawn have been intentionally left like this to improve the health of critters such as beneficial insects or pollinators.

Cover Bare Soil: Did you know sediment is one of the largest sources of pollution to our streams and rivers? Sediment enters into waterways through runoff and erosion of bare soil. Too much sediment can degrade the quality of water for drinking, wildlife, and the land surrounding streams and rivers. Sediment can clog stormwater drains, transport other pollutants into waterways, and prevent light from penetrating through water, which is essential for a functioning ecological system. However, you can do your part to help prevent sediment from entering our waterways.

Cover any bare soil on your property with mulch (this can include leaves) or vegetation. If there is a large amount of bare soil on your property, consider installing erosion control blankets and temporary fiber rolls to prevent sediment eroding into nearby waterways.

Winterizing Rain Barrels: Winter will be here shortly so remember to winterize your rain barrels! The freeze-thaw temperatures we experience in Southwest Ohio can be harsh on the barrels. Keep your rain barrels damage-free during the winter season by following these easy steps:

- Start by draining the barrel and disconnecting the gutter.
- Replace the rain barrel with a temporary gutter extension, to shed water away from your foundation.
- Give your barrel a good clean power wash or use a scrub brush to remove any buildup inside.



- Disassemble and remove any hoses and valves to prevent damage from freezing temperatures.

You can store the barrel outside, as long as water cannot enter it. Your rain barrel will stay safe from the winter elements, and will be ready to go in the Spring. Butler Soil and Water Conservation District has resources and advice for residents wishing to install rain barrels on their property, and can answer any questions related to assembly and maintenance. Please contact our office at (513) 887-3720.

Thank you for taking the time to protect our natural resources this fall!



USDA/NRCS News

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is announcing fiscal year 2022 assistance opportunities for agricultural producers and private landowners for key programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program. While USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) accepts applications for these programs year-round, producers and landowners should apply by state-specific ranking dates to be considered for this year's funding.

For Ohio, this includes January 14, 2022 for EQIP, CSP, RCPP, and AMA. ACEP ranking dates are December 3 for Agricultural Land Easement and December 17 for Wetland Reserve Program. CSP for 2023 ranking date is tentatively scheduled for March 31, 2022.

Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources and builds resiliency.

Applying for Assistance

NRCS accepts applications for its conservation programs year-round. These dates account for producer needs, staff workload, and ensure potential participants have ample opportunity to apply. Producers should apply by their state's ranking dates to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Funding is provided through a competitive process.

Program Options

EQIP provides cost share assistance for producers to use 170-plus conservation practices to address a wide variety of resource concerns. Within EQIP, Conservation Incentive Contracts allow producers to further target priority resource concerns. CSP helps producers take their conservation activities to the next level through comprehensive conservation and advanced conservation activities. ACEP helps producers enroll wetlands, grasslands, and farmlands into easements for long-term protection. Additionally, through RCPP, producers and landowners can work with partners who are co-investing with NRCS on targets projects.

For further information on dates and programs, contact Butler County NRCS at (513) 785-6660.



Program Updates

Ohio Division of Agriculture

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine has announced that 800 producers in the 10-county H2Ohio expansion area of the Western Lake Erie Basin have enrolled 600,000 additional acres in the program. These applications represent nearly \$11.5 million in H2Ohio practice incentives and approximately 36 percent of the cropland in the project area.

"High enrollment among farmers shows their commitment to improving our state's water quality," Governor DeWine said. "It is my hope that more producers will choose to become a part of this effort as H2Ohio continues to expand. Together, these Best Management Practices will make a big difference."

The Ohio Department of Agriculture's portion of the H2Ohio program incentivizes producers for implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) to help reduce nutrient runoff into waterways. It was originally rolled out in 14 counties of the Maumee River Watershed, then expanded to 10 more to include all of the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB).

In the expansion area, all producers signed up for Voluntary Nutrient Management Plans (VNMP). VNMPs provide a science-based foundation from which all other BMPs can be built. A completed and approved VNMP is required for each producer enrolled in H2Ohio. Producers also enrolled nearly 64,000 acres in Conservation Crop Rotation and more than 130,000 acres in Cover Crops.

Enrollment in the 10-county WLEB Expansion area closed on October 15. Enrollment in the original 14 county area was reopened and remains open until January 15, 2022. Producers can contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District for information.

The Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative has been a valuable partner in H2Ohio and has helped to gain producer interest. Farmers taking part in H2Ohio must also enroll in the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative's Farmer Certification Program at www.OhioACI.org, which will gather information about what farmers are proactively implementing on their farms to support healthy soil and water and what they could be doing more of by utilizing H2Ohio funding.

The Great Monarch Migration

Brady Smith, Rural Specialist

The journey of monarchs is one of the insect world's greatest phenomena. Sometimes traveling thousands of miles to their destination, the instinct and environmental triggers that cause them to move are still not fully understood by researchers.

Natural Phenomena

The North American monarch's journey begins at their overwintering grounds in the mountains of Mexico. Monarchs cluster together on Oyamel Fir Trees, nearly 2 miles above sea level; it is important for them to gather in groups to conserve body heat. Generation 1 monarchs are the offspring of those who migrated south the previous fall, and as generation 1 moves north they will lay their eggs and the butterflies will die off. It will take 3 to 4 generations of butterflies throughout the summer to reach their northernmost point before returning back south again. The final group to be born before returning to their overwintering grounds is sometimes called the "super generation". The super generation is the largest and strongest, since many of these travel up to 3,000 miles. Their size and stamina is pivotal to their ability to withstand the long treacherous trip ahead.

A Troubled Journey The monarchs don't have it easy; over the last 40 years the monarch population has decreased by over 80%. Habitat destruction, roadkill, and illegal logging are mostly to blame. Native plant populations that once fed millions of monarchs have been destroyed or replaced by non-native lawns and ornamental horticultural plants. Without appropriate food and habitat sources, the butterflies are at risk of total species collapse within the next 50 years. In areas of high automotive traffic, states where huge groups of monarchs converge, such as Texas, are seeking to install protective netting over roadways to redirect the butterflies out of harm's way. This method has proven highly effective amongst the Asian monarch populations. Another detriment to the monarchs is the loss of milkweed. Milkweed is the host plant for monarch caterpillars, this means milkweed is the only plant that they can survive on. Without milkweed, butterflies have no place to lay their eggs, leading to the further downfall and eventual extinction of monarchs entirely. Female monarchs lay eggs over a 2- 5 week period; resulting in about 300-400 eggs! Each egg is laid on a single milkweed plant. Collecting milkweed pods helps the monarchs as well as provides a food source for over 450 other species.



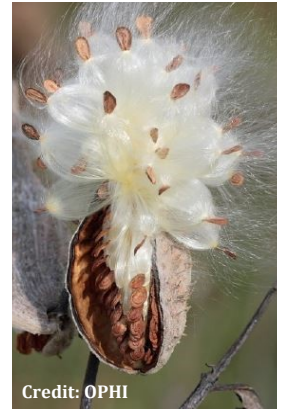
Hope For The Future

As monarchs face a variety of obstacles, groups and organizations are now promoting education and providing resources to assist the monarch. With events such as Pollinator Week and seed pods collections, they help bring awareness to the plight of the population.

Fall Planting for Monarchs

Lynn White, Education & Volunteer Specialist

Now is the perfect time to sow milkweed seeds for monarch butterflies. Monarch caterpillars, being the picky creatures they are, feed exclusively on the leaves of milkweed. As such, milkweed is critical for the survival of monarchs. With it, they cannot complete their life cycle and their populations as a result decline.



Milkweed is best planted in the fall months. The seeds require cold to break out of dormancy. While it's much easier to have nature do this, you can also try to do it yourself by placing seeds in the refrigerator in the spring.

Step-By-Step Milkweed Seed Planting:

1. Clear mulch or rocks away from the area, you don't want them to block the growth of the tiny seedlings.
2. Water the soil before planting. This avoids washing away the seeds.
3. Make a hole about 1/4" deep.
4. Exact spacing now is not necessary, seeds can move over winter and some won't germinate.
5. Place one seed in each hole, then cover with already moist soil.
6. You can place a few inches of leaf mulch or straw over the area to keep the soil from drying out.
7. Remember to mark your location so you know where to look in the spring for seedlings.
8. 1-2 months after the seedlings have sprouted, you can pinch off or transplant seedlings if they are too close.

If you would prefer to wait to plant seeds in the spring, you can find directions on how to start your seeds on the Butler SWCD website at www.butlerswcd.org/pollinators.

If you don't have any milkweed seeds, but are eager to get started, Butler SWCD has seed packets available. The seeds are collected during the Milkweed Seed Pod Collection event each fall. These seeds are also used in the Ohio Department of Transportation projects throughout the state. To find out more about this program, please visit www.ophi.info/.

If You See Something, Say Something

As you drive south on State Route 127 from Oxford headed into Seven Mile, you might have noticed a large billboard with the caption *"If you see something, say something, illegal dumping is a crime."* The billboard has a picture of law enforcement looking at trash that has been dumped. While the billboard may not be as flashy as others around the county, it is still a very important message that everyone needs to be aware of.

Unlike littering, which is still a crime, illegal dumping can carry a serious penalty. Not only is trash an issue itself when not disposed of properly, but the trash, debris, and any liquids, solvents, or other chemicals thrown out can impact our local streams and rivers along with the wildlife in those areas.

On occasion our office receives calls about illegal dumping. Those calls are turned in to the Butler County Storm Water District, who manages all illegal dumping violations.

So, in the future if you do see something, then say something. Let's all protect the natural resources that provide us with so many benefits. To contact the Butler County Storm Water District call (513) 785-5744.

Congratulations to the 2021 Butler SWCD Award Winners!

As Butler SWCD wraps up a very busy year, we'd like to extend a huge congratulations to this year's award recipients.



Pictured from left to right: Outstanding Cooperator Ronald L. Bulach, Friend of Conservation Harold Baxter Jr., Joe Dudley Outstanding Conservationist Rita Bill, and the Conservation Educator of the Year Suzanne Zazycki.



Ins & Outs of Composting

Lynn White, Education & Volunteer Specialist

Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments, and you can use it instead of commercial fertilizers. Compost loosens clay soils, improves soil fertility, stimulates healthy root development in plants, improves soil capacity to hold water, and attracts earthworms and other beneficial microbes to your soil. The best part is that you can make it without spending a dime!

Think of your compost as pet care or mini farming. Just like any animal, you will need to provide it with the basic needs of life: food, water, air, shelter, and suitable habitat. This is for the benefit of the bacteria and other decomposers such as worms, millipedes, roly-polies, etc. who do most of the hard work.

Food: Almost any organic material is suitable. Be careful to avoid yard waste if you recently used chemicals such as pesticides, it could kill the compost-critters. Also avoid food covered in oil or grease, as this will smell badly. The pile needs a balanced diet or mix of about 30 parts carbon-rich materials, and 1 part nitrogen-rich materials. If there is too much carbon this slows the process and too much nitrogen can cause the pile to stink. Break your materials into small pieces. The smaller the pieces the quicker you will get finished compost.

Water: The compost materials should feel like a wrung out sponge. Too wet and it can smell. Too dry and your compost-critters will slow their work.

Air: Just as we need to breathe, so do the roly-polies, millipedes, worms, and beneficial bacteria and fungus.

Shelter: You can put the materials in a compost bin or just make a free-standing pile. The pile should not be any smaller than 3x3x3 foot to provide the perfect environment for your critters to survive and work. Any smaller and the compost temperatures will not rise.

Habitat: This is important to you and to the compost. Too far from the house and it won't be used. Right up against the wooden siding of your home and the critters could mistake the siding as their lunch!

If you would like to learn more about composting you can watch a video from our recent composting workshop. To watch visit www.youtube.com/user/butlerswcd.

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Mission: To promote the conservation, restoration, and responsible use of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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Butler SWCD Holiday Closing Dates

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December 24 & 31

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 January 2022

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BEST Volunteer Program 2022

Butler Soil and Water Conservation District is working on our volunteer calendar for 2022, and we hope to include new projects and new locations. Some new ideas for 2022 are removing invasive plants at the Boys and Girls Club in West Chester, and cleaning up part of the Mill Creek corridor in Fairfield/West Chester area. If you have any suggestions or thoughts on volunteer events for the upcoming year please reach out by contacting Lynn White at (513) 785-6666.



Last project of 2021:

Thursday, December 2 from 5 - 7pm
Creating Wildlife Friendly Holiday Decorations

First project of 2022:

Thursday, January 13 from 6 - 8pm
Creating Conservation Lesson Kits for Teachers

Forestry Workshop

Date: Saturday, November 20th

Time: 9:00 AM

Location: Miami University Ecology Research Center,
5806 Somerville Road, Oxford 45056

This workshop is aimed at landowners who wish to improve forest stands, manage invasive species, harvest timber, and improve overall forest health.

Guest Speakers:

- Pat Migliozi, Area Service Forester, Ohio Division of Forestry
- Robert Mulligan, Forestry Pollution Abatement Manager, Ohio Division of Forestry
- Terry Lavy, The Conservationist LLC

Topics to be covered include forest tax, timber harvest plans, forestry best management practices, and invasive species management.

To register for this event please call or email Brady Smith, Rural Specialist at:

(513) 785-6663 or smithbe@butlercountyohio.org