



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

ISSUE 15 - SPRING/SUMMER 2016

'Contain' Your Enthusiasm | What's Happening? | Food Scrap Redux | Pet Friendly Yards | Going Batty

## 'Contain' Your Enthusiasm



Well, actually enthusiasm is pretty hard to contain when you see how easy it is to start a container garden. This stormwater friendly option is a good choice for nearly every type of outdoor space, large or small, suburban or urban. You can use container gardening to make a statement for your entryway, enhance your patio, create a focal point by adding color and drama, or feed your family. Yep, you read that right. With just a few containers, you can grow a surprising array and amount of vegetables, from lettuce and tomatoes to carrots and potatoes. Whether you are a beginner or have always had a green thumb, following a few easy guidelines will help maximize your container gardening success: 1. Decide what you want to grow, and do a little research to determine if the amount of sun your chosen space receives will be right for your 'crop' choices. 2. Select the right sized container for your plant choices. Some plants like squash and vining tomatoes need a deep container because their root zones require as much as 30" of growing medium while others like leaf lettuce and scallions can thrive with just 4". 3. Use a commercial soilless mix specifically designed for container gardening. These mixes are lighter in weight, drain better than regular garden soil, and often contain materials that help retain moisture. 4. If the growing medium you have chosen does not contain a fertilizer, add a slow release organic fertilizer according to package directions. 5. Make sure that you keep your container garden well watered, according to the needs of the plants you are growing. Some container grown plants can require watering two or three times each week. There are many websites and publications available to provide you with more information about successful container gardening. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System publication [Container Gardening](#) or attending [Earth Day at The Gardens](#) is a great start!

## What's Happening?

**Birmingham Botanical Gardens Spring Plant Sale, April 15 - 17 - Brookwood Village** - Visit [bbgardens.org](http://bbgardens.org) to learn more.

**Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Seminar Series - Birmingham Botanical Gardens** - This free series of [seminars](#) starting in May and running through October offers fresh and practical ideas and techniques for your landscape and garden. No reservations are required; light refreshments provided.

**Do Dah Day - May 14 - Rhodes and Caldwell Parks, Birmingham** - Go to [dodahday.org](http://dodahday.org) for information about this fun, family friendly event.

**Rain Barrel Workshop - June 18** - Learn how to build a rain barrel or purchase one to take home, and start enjoying the benefits that storing and using rainwater can bring. Preregistration required by June 8. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

**Step Away from the Spray!** - Stop by Storm Water Management (B-210 Courthouse Annex) to pick up a free mosquito dunk kit, or invite us to speak at your next community or organization meeting. These biologic dunks target and kill mosquito larvae in standing water, they can't accidentally kill pollinators like bees or butterflies, and they do not harm people, pets or wildlife.

## Food Scrap Redux



Wait! Don't throw away those fruit and vegetable scraps! With a little planning and preparation, you can use the ends, roots, and stems of many fruit and vegetable scraps to [grow new plants](#). Plants are pretty amazing because they have the ability to regrow a genetically identical copy of themselves. The process of growing new plants from their own parts is called vegetative propagation. Some of the easiest plants to grow from scraps include: lettuce, celery, potatoes, carrots, garlic, onions, green onions, ginger, basil, and cilantro. With a little time and patience you can even grow your own avocados and pineapples. Some scraps have a few [requirements](#), such as using toothpicks to suspend them in a shallow container of water or placing them in a particular orientation in soil to maximize growing success. Once plants started in water have grown a sufficient root system, they can be transplanted into a container with soilless mix or directly into a garden plot. Some vegetables such as lettuce and green onions can thrive indefinitely in a container of water that is changed every week or so without being transplanted. With these plants, as well as most herbs, you can just trim off what you need, and allow the plant to regrow.

## Pet Friendly Yards



Most pets love to run and play outdoors. Pets also enjoy digging in the dirt, rolling in vegetation, and chewing and eating all sorts of things they find in the yard. We love our pets and want to keep them healthy and safe. That's why you may want to consider [pet proofing](#) your yard for your four legged friend's romps outdoors. While you probably already have implemented ways to protect your pet from many threats such as traffic and other animals, there still could be danger lurking in your landscape. Making sure that your yard is free from plants that are toxic to dogs and cats will help protect your pet. Another important consideration is picking up and properly disposing of [pet waste](#). An average sized dog produces about 1/2 pound of waste per day. Multiply that by 365 and your yard could easily be host to 182 pounds of dog doo in a year. The average pile of dog waste contains 2.5 billion fecal coliform bacteria as well as viruses and parasites. Dog or cat waste does not act as a fertilizer and in fact can kill grass and plants. You also probably have noticed that your pet usually chooses the same areas to do its 'doody'. That's because your pet doesn't like to walk or play in its own waste. Routinely picking up pet waste from your yard, bagging it in a dark plastic bag to heat up and kill pathogens, and disposing of it in the trash is an important part of keeping your pet and your family safe and healthy.

## Going Batty



Besides being high on many people's list of creepy animals, most of us really don't know too much about [bats](#). These primarily nocturnal creatures usually live in trees, buildings, caves, and other sheltered places. While most of us sleep, bats perform some vital functions that directly benefit humans. Several varieties of bats feed on nectar, and serve as important pollinators for plants like bananas, mangoes and cocoa. (Think about that next time you have a piece of chocolate!) The majority of bats feed on insects and have such voracious appetites that just one small bat can eat more than 1000 mosquitos in one night. Mosquitos are not just pesky; they also can carry [dangerous viruses](#). So it makes sense that attracting bats to come and live in your yard can provide a chemical free, low cost way to help make a dent in the number of mosquitos that can plague you and your family. Purchasing or [building](#) a few bat houses and installing them on poles or on the side of your house that gets the most sun will provide an invitation for bats to come [live](#) and work in your yard. Since they are nocturnal, chances are good that you will never even see them! Another proactive measure to cut down on the mosquito population is to take steps to prevent mosquitoes from breeding on your property in the first place. Walk around your yard and remove any items which can hold standing water, such as buckets or empty containers. If there are elements in your landscape like low areas that can hold water but you cannot do anything to change them, consider using [mosquito dunks](#) on a monthly basis in these areas to kill mosquito larvae. While these efforts will not completely eliminate mosquitos from your yard, they will help reduce the opportunities for mosquitoes to breed and feed.

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

If you have questions, comments, or want to schedule a presentation for your community or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County, email [Lyn.DiClemente@jccal.org](mailto:Lyn.DiClemente@jccal.org) or call 325.8741.