

Seasonal Stormwater Tips

The winter season is upon us and with it colder weather. Here are some ways to make sure you celebrate this season while keeping stormwater healthy!

Winterize your rain barrels

Rain barrels collect rain water from your roof that would otherwise be diverted into storm drains and streams; pollutants and chemicals with it. The collected rain water provides a free supply of water to homeowners, while lessening the amount of polluted rain water runoff in streams and waterways. With cold, winter temperatures, rain barrels are susceptible to freezing, cracking or warping. There are five simple steps you can take to make your rain barrel last longer and prevent damage during the winter months:

1. Disconnect the rain barrel from the gutter downspout or close the diverter if you have one.
2. Drain all water from the barrel. Make sure to drain the water from attached hoses, as well. This will prevent residual water from freezing and cracking the barrel.
3. Clean the inside of the barrel. Over time the rain barrel can collect deposits or residue that need to be cleaned to keep the barrel in its best condition. Try washing with soapy water and rinsing with vinegar and water, but take care not to dump the rinse water on your plants.
4. Store your rain barrel so it will not collect rain water until you're ready to return it to service in the spring.
5. Reconnect the gutter downspout. Make sure this is positioned away from the house to avoid any flooding around the foundation.

These steps may vary depending on your type of rain barrel, but should help keep it in good condition for years to come!



Keep your drains grease free

Did you know that the presence of fats, oils, and grease, or FOG, in your sewer pipes are a big cause of household sewer backups? Approximately fifty percent of sewage backups and overflows are caused by grease that has coagulated and built up in sewer pipes under homes and streets. This time of year in particular is when plumbers see the most increase in sewer backups. Greases and oils that are collected from holiday roasts, turkeys, and bacon are poured down sink drains where they solidify in sewer pipes. Plumbers across the country see a dramatic increase in service calls from people with clogged sinks the day after Thanksgiving. In 2013, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), who provides service to Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, experienced 136 sewer overflows, 40 of them being related to grease and fats. Overflows



such as these have the potential to send millions of gallons of untreated wastewater and raw human waste into creeks and rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay.

How to cease the grease

What is best way to make sure that your sewer pipes remain unclogged this holiday season? Never pour fats, oil, or grease down the drain! Collect the FOG from cooking and let it cool to room temperature before disposing it in the trashcan. Liquid fats and oils can be collected in old containers with lids or absorbed with kitty litter or sawdust. A common misconception is that running hot water or detergents can prevent greases from solidifying in your sewer pipes. The heat and lubricants quickly dissipate underground, causing the FOG to coagulate in sewer pipes further underneath your home or under streets. If you do spot a sewer overflow, be sure to report it to your county immediately.

Visit the websites below for more information:

<http://epochrainbarrels.com/how-to-winterize-your-rain-barrel/>

<http://www.bluewaterbaltimore.org/blog/dont-be-a-turkey-no-grease-down-the-drain/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/a-thanksgiving-tradition-a-great-feast--and-pipes-clogged-with-used-cooking-grease>

