

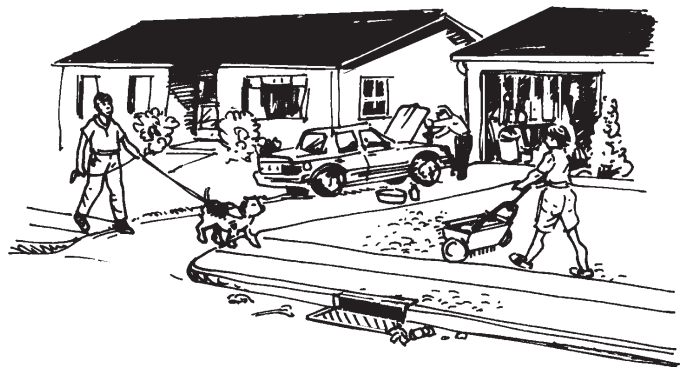
PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HOME AND YARD YARD CARE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



It is an unfortunate fact of urban life—many of our rivers and lakes have been polluted. It may be a surprise, however, to learn that water pollution often starts at your house.

In the community. Urban water pollution begins when development alters natural processes. Removing vegetation and replacing it with streets, rooftops and driveways greatly decreases the amount of water soaking into the soil. As a consequence, the amount of water running to rivers and lakes increases dramatically.

How does the water get from street to stream? Nearly every city street has storm sewer inlets, which open into a network of underground pipes. Leaves, litter, pet wastes, and other materials dumped or washed into storm sewer inlets do not go to a sewage treatment plant,



but flow directly to rivers and lakes. Also, most storm sewer systems are designed to remove water from developed areas quickly during a storm. This allows pollutants to reach rivers and lakes at a “rapid transit” pace.

Around the home. Our actions around home can either help or harm water quality. For example, rain can wash improperly applied lawn fertilizer and pesticides into lakes and rivers. On the other hand, careful landscaping and sound lawn care practices can reduce the need for chemicals and protect water quality.

Similarly, good auto maintenance pays in the long run, but poor auto maintenance can seriously harm our waters. Anything that drips from a motor vehicle—oil, gas, antifreeze—can wash into storm sewers. These materials are toxic to aquatic life. Dumping them into a storm sewer has surprising consequences. Just 5 quarts of oil in a river or lake can create a slick as large as two football fields.



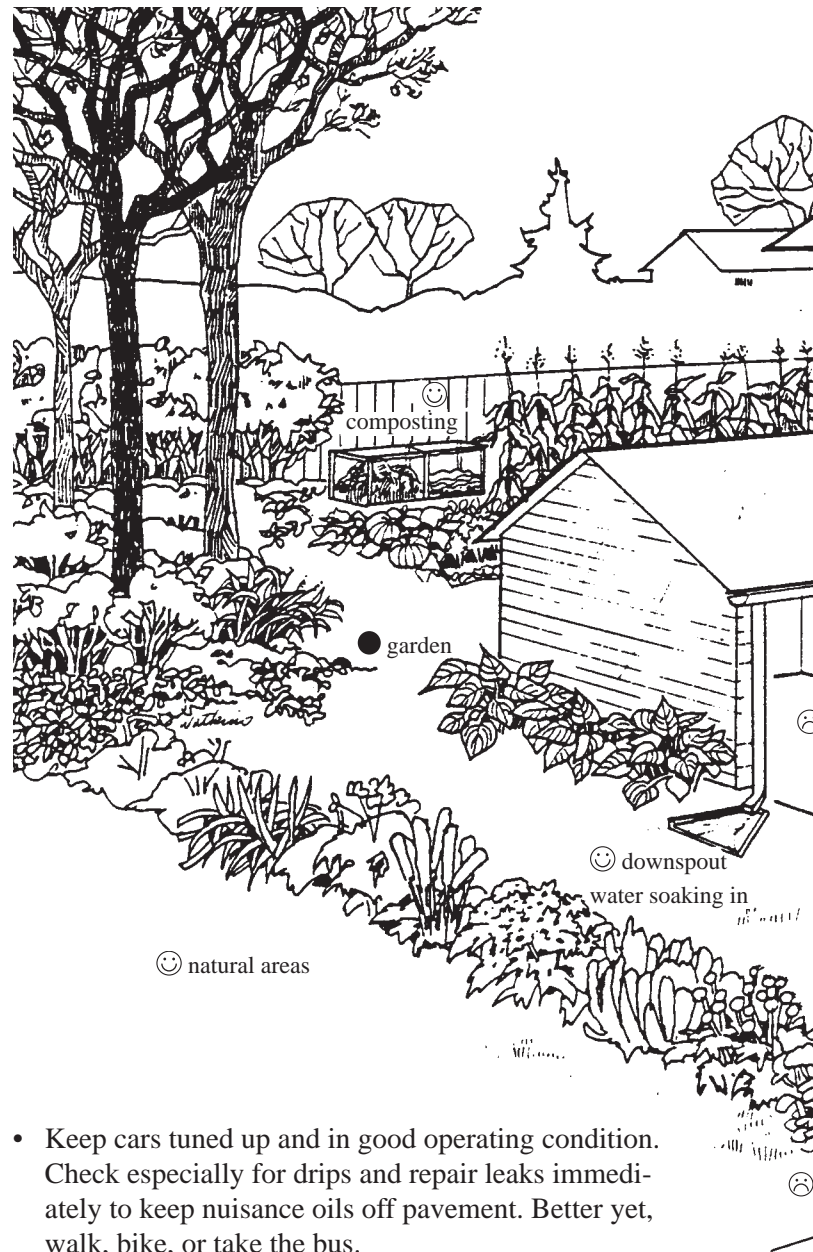
Clearly, there is a need to rethink practices we're doing at home if urban waters are to be clean and usable. Fortunately, we can all contribute to cleaner water while making our homes and communities more attractive and livable by following some simple tips.

Simple Tips for Cleaner Water

It really doesn't matter whether you live in the city or the country . . . whether your home is large or small . . . whether you have a lot of time and money to invest in your yard or just a little. There is something you can do to improve water quality. The following suggestions are ways that you can make a contribution to clean water and a healthy environment.

Around your home

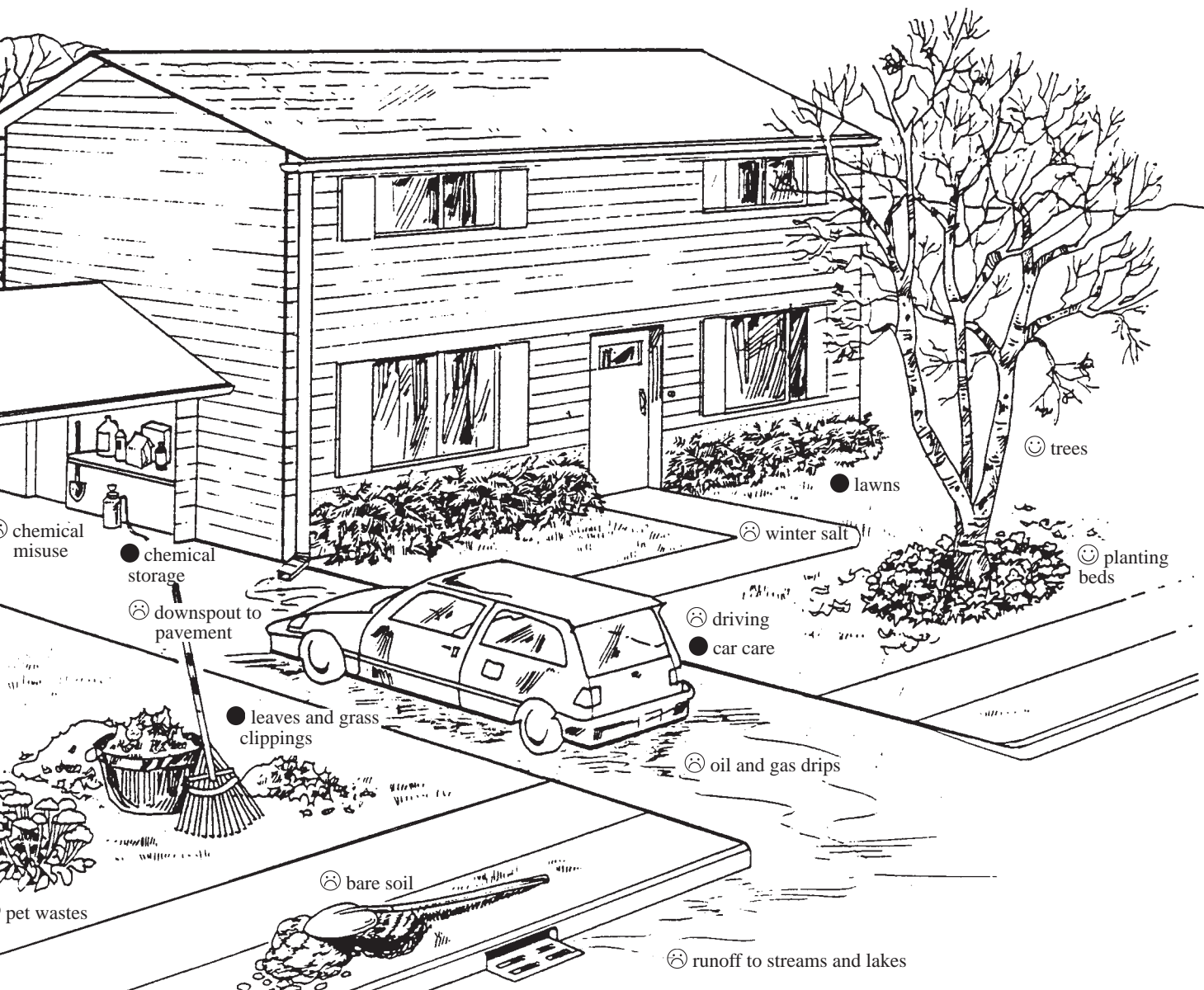
- Mow often enough to leave grass clippings on the lawn, and do not discharge the clippings into the street when mowing. If you catch your clippings, use them as a mulch or compost them.
- Keep fallen leaves out of the street-side gutter or ditch; use them for composting or mulching.
- Plant an extra tree for multiple environmental benefits, especially where it becomes part of a planting bed or "naturalized" landscape area that recycles leaves, twigs, and other yard "wastes."
- Seed bare soil and/or cover it with a mulch as soon as possible to minimize erosion. Disturb no more ground than necessary for a project, while preserving existing vegetation.
- Direct roof downspouts away from foundation and driveways to planting beds or lawns where water can safely soak into the ground. Consider using a rain barrel if practical.
- Use lawn and garden chemicals carefully and only when needed. Pesticides, including weed killers, should be considered a last resort—other controls come first.
- Be extra careful not to contaminate storm sewers, lakes, and streams with pesticides.
- Dispose of unwanted pesticides and other chemicals at your nearest designated collection site.
- Collect oil and other automotive products, preferably for recycling at collecting sites.
- Wash cars where soapy water can't quickly run toward the nearest storm sewer, picking up other pollutants as it goes.



- Keep cars tuned up and in good operating condition. Check especially for drips and repair leaks immediately to keep nuisance oils off pavement. Better yet, walk, bike, or take the bus.
- For waterfront property, grow a "buffer strip" of dense, natural vegetation along the water's edge to filter pollutants and stabilize the shoreline.
- If using a septic tank system, maintain it properly through regular inspections and licensed pumping.
- Think about the environment as you plan your landscape.
- Clean up pet wastes, from which nutrients and bacteria could be washed towards lakes and streams.
- Use deicing salts in winter only when needed. Use sand or chip the ice off pavement when possible.

In your community

- Support and follow ordinances that limit soil erosion from construction sites.



Home Hot Spots for Water Quality

Around every yard are spots where your activities affect water quality. The illustration shows a few of them. Take a look around your own home with an eye toward water quality.

😊 Good for water quality

☹️ Bad for water quality

● Could be good or bad, depending on your actions

- Encourage storm water management practices that reduce runoff pollution by temporarily holding water in ponds or letting it soak into the ground.
- Encourage the safe but conservative use of salt on roads and limit application to critical areas.
- Tell public officials about your interest in cleaning up local waters and their value to recreation and the economy.
- Support the preservation of wetlands as natural filters that protect water quality, prevent flooding, and provide vital open space.
- Promote “environmental or parkway corridors” adjacent to streams and waterways for water quality, wildlife, and multiple-use benefits alike.
- Participate in groups, projects, and events that promote conservation, waterfront recreation, or shoreline restoration.

Principles of Environmentally Sound Yard Care

This publication describes an approach to yard care that is both practical and environmentally sound. It offers down-to-earth tips for protecting water quality around your home and in your community. Look for information on home “hot spots” for water quality.

Environmentally sound yard care means:

- Thinking of environmental consequences in addition to conveniences.
- Planning for greater harmony with natural surroundings.
- Being conservative and resourceful, rather than wasteful.

- Believing that small changes collectively make a big difference.
- Capitalizing on the time and cost-savings that rethinking yard care can bring.

Fact sheets in the Yard Care and the Environment series are designed to illustrate principles of environmentally sound yard care. They provide specific information about pesticides, fertilizers, landscaping, watering and related topics. These and other publications can be obtained from your K-State Research and Extension county office. Help is also available regarding soil testing, pesticide identification, plant selection and other important items related to yard care and water quality.

This publication was adapted from a publication by the University of Wisconsin—Extension and Department of Natural Resources.

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