



# The Ecology Action Center News

Summer 2009

## In this issue:

Learn how to be  
Yard Smart!

Keeping our  
Water Clean

Habitat goes  
green

Sugar Creek  
Clean Up

Yard Smart  
Garden Walk

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9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Monday—Friday

## Protect Our Environment... BE YARD SMART!!

-Jennifer Schauer, EAC Intern



As the weather warms, our backyards become our escape as we begin to venture out of our homes to enjoy our greening surroundings. But as summer approaches our lawns beg for constant attention from fertilizers and sprinkler systems to keep them looking radiant. The Ecology Action Center is asking you to please keep in mind the harmful effects that our conventional lawncare often involves. A few of these risks include links to cancer, developmental issues in children, contamination of drinking water and also

destruction of wildlife habitats. ([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)) The EAC has put together three main strategies to develop an environmentally sustainable yard; reducing use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, conserving natural resources and restoring natural habitats. First, the major issues with each of these three topics will be discussed and then solutions will be offered through the Ecology Action Centers Yard Smart Program.

Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides contribute to the contamination of drinking water in Lake Bloomington and our local watersheds. When water sweeps the streets heading for the nearest storm drain, fertilizers, pesticides, yard waste and other debris gets carried as well. Even short cut lawns are 90% impervious, leading to increased fertilizer and pesticide runoff. Many people are unaware that these storm drains actually do not get filtered at all before being emptied into our lakes, rivers and watersheds. ([www.wildlifehc.org](http://www.wildlifehc.org))

Reducing your use of natural resources, energy and waste is an important step to achieve environmental sustainability as well. Americans consume nearly two thirds of the world's energy, are depleting water 25% faster than it can be restored and produce more waste than imaginable. ([www.NRDC.org](http://www.NRDC.org)) Help us work against these statistics by reducing water and gasoline use and composting extra waste.

The third environmental issue that needs to be discussed is replanting natural habitat. When the native lands have been cultivated for development, homes of millions of creatures have been displaced. Replanting native flora will help reduce the need of fertilizers, pesticides and constant watering by naturally adapting to the changing seasons. It will also give homes back to these species.

With recent studies on fertilizers and pesticides demonstrating these negative risks, the Ecology Action Center has developed a program called Yard Smart to help promote environmental sustainability. The Yard Smart program works against these negative risks by reducing the use of synthetic fertilizers, increasing native plants and conserving natural resources.

Continued on pg 2



# Summer at the EAC

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DeAnna Belz  
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Joining the Yard Smart program will lead to a number of benefits for both you and your community such as:

- Increased safety for children, adults, pets, wildlife, and all living things.
- Conserves natural resources like water and fossil fuels.
- Decreases storm water runoff contamination.
- Supports native diversity in plants and wildlife.
- Reduction of air, soil, and water pollution.
- Works with (not against) nature.

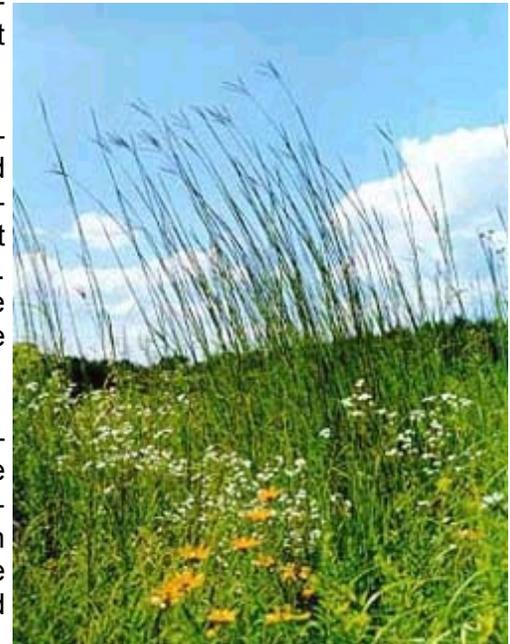
There are three different types of Yard Smart programs that you can participate in; *Chemical-Free Yard*, *Easy on the Earth Yard*, and *Wildlife Habitat Yard*. Each program specializes in a particular area to provide ways that you can help improve your lawn care practices. Below each program is listed with the basic expectations it withholds:

*The Chemical-Free Yard* encourages homeowners to avoid using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Instead this yard would use slow-release organic fertilizers that allow the root system to grow proportionally with the plant. As for garden pests, fungi, and weeds there are a number of safer alternatives to choose from.

*Easy on the Earth Yard* focuses on the reduction of waste and use of resources. Some ways to accomplish this goal are through composting, recycling lawn equipment, using rain barrels and mulching. It also strives to reduce energy use through electric or human powered mowers and other tools.

*The Wildlife Habitat* requires planting native flora as well as providing adequate food, water and shelter to support local animal species. Our website contains a complete list of plants native to McLean County.

Applying for Yard Smart is simple. By signing a pledge to commit to one of these different programs, you can begin actively promoting safe lawn care. You will receive a Yard Smart sign that you can place in your yard to help inform your neighbors of the progressive steps that you are taking. If this article has stirred some curiosity, visit our website! It contains a lot more information on how to be Yard Smart as well as the forms you will need to begin! If fully committing to be Yard Smart is not practical for you at this time, there are still easy steps that you can do to help reduce your lawns negative environmental footprint. The Yard Smart Certification forms contain a check list of numerous different ideas and approaches that you could take.





***Plant native plants because they don't need fertilizers, pesticides, and little water to grow in our environment!***

## Keeping our water clean

-Erin Hussy, EAC Intern

When it rains, it pours. And this can be a problem: when it rains, storm water falls to the ground. This water either flows over impermeable surfaces like driveways and streets or otherwise through areas that might be chemically treated such as landscaped yards, golf courses, and agricultural areas. In either case, the storm water picks up fertilizers, pesticides, oils, garbage, silt, and many other contaminants. This water drains to streams, rivers, lakes, and eventually the ocean. The pollutants are carried with the storm water into our lakes and oceans. This is causing problems not only locally but also on the national scale.

Non-point source pollution is the nation's largest water pollution problem. Non-point sources basically are many smaller areas polluting the environment that combine to become a much bigger problem. It is also what has reduced the quality of water in Lake Bloomington and Evergreen Lake to create problems with nitrates and phosphorus in Bloomington's drinking water. Nitrates are known to cause Blue Baby Syndrome in infants and may be linked to other health issues as well.

In addition to our local waterways forty percent of the Continental U.S.'s streams and rivers drain into the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River empties into the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Louisiana where we find the "Dead Zone", a 7,000 square mile area off the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico that essentially has no life. What has caused this? Well basically the fresh water, containing nitrates and phosphorus from fertilizers, emptying from the Mississippi River is layered on top of the salt water. Phosphorus in the fresh water ignites huge algae blooms, but since the fish are in the salt water they cannot reach the algae. When the algae die, it sinks into the saltier water below and decomposes using up the oxygen in the deeper water. As the oxygen content is depleted, the deeper water becomes a dead zone. Small organisms die because of the lack of oxygen and fish avoid the area. As a result, fishing fleets must travel even further out to sea to get past this barren area.

In spite of the number of water quality problems occurring today, there are ways we as individuals can help. Here at the Ecology Action Center we need individuals or groups to help with storm drain stenciling efforts and stream clean ups. Reduce non-point source pollution by avoiding detrimental practices such as dumping paint down the drain, littering, and using chemical fertilizers. Be Yard Smart by using environmentally friendly products instead of fertilizers and pesticides! Plant native plants because they don't need fertilizers, pesticides, and little water to grow in our environment! Native plants also create a natural home for wildlife and therefore will attract birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. For a list of central Illinois native plants suitable for landscaping, visit [http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/yard-smart/2009/Native\\_Plants.pdf](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/yard-smart/2009/Native_Plants.pdf). Volunteer with the Illinois River Watch Network and help collect data for further research. For more information on how you can help visit our website, call, or stop by the Ecology Action Center.



***Habitat is  
always  
looking for  
volunteers to  
assist in  
fundraising  
efforts and  
to share  
their  
expertise...***

## **Habitat goes Green**

-Heather DeLong

Today, many businesses and homeowners are “going green” and bringing environmental issues into focus. This year the Illinois State University and Illinois Wesleyan University Student Chapter of Habitat for Humanity is bringing this focus to McLean County. In partnership with Habitat for Humanity of McLean County, students are planning to build their first green houses. While the exact locations are still being chosen, these homes will incorporate inexpensive ways to go green. Habitat for Humanity has been building houses for low-income families in McLean County since 1985. The families purchase their homes at zero percent interest and work on site during the period of construction to fulfill their “sweat equity” hours.

In order to build in accordance with the Habitat mission, it is essential that the homes remain simple, affordable and easy to maintain. Construction on the more energy, water and resource efficient houses will begin after Labor Day. Careful attention to site selection and management, indoor environmental quality, and homeowner education will also play important roles in the project. Project partners hope to have the homes rated as both LEED Homes ([www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)) and under the NAHB’s National Green Building Program ([www.nahbgreen.org](http://www.nahbgreen.org)).

For the past six years, Habitat of McLean County has received 5-star ratings for its homes built to Energy Star standards. Bill Waller, construction manager at Habitat McLean, explained, “Since we’ve mastered the construction of 5-star Energy Star houses, its time to move to the next level of green building.” Tom Gerschick, faculty advisor for the ISU chapter of Habitat, and Rebecca Rossi, long-time Habitat volunteer and LEED Accredited Professional, have been interested in Habitat International’s initiative encouraging affiliates to move beyond energy conservation and into creating deeper green homes for some time. The pair brought this subject to the attention of the McLean County chapter. Rossi stated that in a green home, new homeowners will save money on utilities, as well as transportation because the lots are adjacent to existing services, amenities, and public transportation. The ever-increasing problem of childhood asthma and allergies make better indoor air quality an important consideration. Paints, flooring, and cabinets will include only products that do not produce harmful emissions. Other green features may include native and drought resistant landscaping and durable building materials.

This is just the first step in an exciting green leap; Habitat for Humanity of McLean County hopes to build more homes to NAHB and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards in the near future. While construction work will be completed by ISU and IWU students, Habitat is always looking for volunteers to assist in fundraising efforts and to share their expertise throughout the planning process. If you are interested in providing fundraising assistance, supporting construction management this fall, or volunteering in another capacity, please call Habitat for Humanity of McLean County at (309) 827-3931 or email [volunteer@habitatmclean.org](mailto:volunteer@habitatmclean.org).



## Don't Forget to check out our Calendar of Events!

### Join the Sugar Creek Clean Up

*June 27, 2009 Saturday from 10:00 am to noon*

Park at the Town of Normal Parking Lot by Town of Normal Outdoor Theater.

We will walk approximately 2 miles along Sugar Creek to the East cleaning garbage. EAC will provide trash grabbers, gloves, and plastic bags. Please wear work clothes and closed toe shoes.

Volunteers must be 16 years old or older or accompanied by an adult. All volunteers must sign a liability waiver; volunteers under 18 years of age must have liability waiver signed by adult.

Please contact Michael Brown to sign up at [www.ecologyactioncenter.org/about/contact.shtml](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/about/contact.shtml) or 309-454-3169.

**Join us June  
27th for a  
tour of our  
local Yard  
Smart  
Yards!!**

### 7th Annual Yard Smart Walk!

- DeAnna Belz

On June 27, the Ecology Action Center will host our 7<sup>th</sup> annual YardSmart Walk. We will meet at the Illinois State University Horticulture Center at 9:00 a.m. to carpool throughout the community. Our first stop is a whimsical fairy yard in an older section of Bloomington owned by a Master Gardener. This yard also has been featured in the past during the Parade of Ponds as well as the Glorious Garden Walk. It is also certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat.

We will go on to tour another Bloomington location which features a variety of edible plants. Mr. Ricker is in the process of transforming his yard into a virtual grocery store. Less grass to mow, more food to eat! Clark Abraham, owner of EcoLawns will share his totally organic yard which not only is chemical free, incorporating lots of native plants, but also kid and pet friendly. Cathy Bilow, from Kid Conscious Lawn Care will share two of the yards she has helped develop in north Normal and we will meet the homeowner as she shares her first experience with square foot gardening.

We will return to the ISU Horticulture Center for lunch provided by Kelly's Bakery in Downtown Bloomington (a \$5.00 donation is requested) and a presentation of backyard composting. Please join us in what is sure to be another fabulous tour through the backyards in Bloomington/Normal.

For more information or to register (by June 24 for lunch), call the Ecology Action Center at 309-454-3169 or email [dbelz@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:dbelz@ecologyactioncenter.org).

Recycle the Ecology Action Center Newsletter by passing it on to someone else after you have read it.



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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

**June 24, 5:30 pm, Build your own rain barrel workshop.** Space is limited and registration is required. Download form from [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org) or stop by the EAC.

**June 27, 9 am–12:30 pm, Yard Smart Garden Walk (see article inside).** Register by calling 309-454-3169 or email [dbelz@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:dbelz@ecologyactioncenter.org). Registration deadline June 24.

**June 27, 10 am, Build your own rain barrel workshop.** Space is limited and registration is required. Download form from [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org) or stop by the EAC.

**June 27, 1 pm, Build your own rain barrel workshop.** Space is limited and registration is required. Download form from [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org) or stop by the EAC.

**June 27, 10 am to 12 pm, Sugar Creek Clean Up (see article inside).**

**June 28, 1 pm to 3:30 pm, Storm Drain Stenciling Workday.** Volunteers needed to help with this important project to help protect our clean water supplies. Volunteers will be notified of starting location within Bloomington-Normal. Email [intern@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:intern@ecologyactioncenter.org) or call 309-454-3169 to sign up to help.

**Coming soon: Build-your-own composter workshops.** Watch the events calendar at [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org) for dates and more information.