

Are You Ready For Fall?

It is time to prepare for the wet season

Picture that old, dry sponge that has been stored under your sink for a few months. It doesn't want to soak up water right away, does it? After months of dry summer weather our **soils act in a similar way during the fall.**

After a long, dry period much of the rain can't soak into the soil. It runs over top of the land into ditches and creeks. During that dry period, pollutants (such as fecal bacteria from livestock, dogs, or wildlife), will build up on the land. When fall rains come, water picks up the pollutants and carries them into our ditches and creeks.

From these ditches and creeks, bacteria is carried downstream into our bays and harbors. Too much bacteria closes beaches to swimming and shellfish harvest. In fact, from October through December, Portage Bay (at the base of the Nooksack River) is closed to shellfish harvest each year. **With your help, our community is working to change that!**



* Note: Poop may also enter the water from direct discharging or dumping.

Many of your neighbors are already taking steps to reduce compaction and mud, improve animal health, and/or avoid high costs of replacing a septic system- all the while, protecting our community's creeks and beaches. If you are one of those neighbors, thank you! If you are looking for some ideas, we've got you covered below.

Tips for Farms

September is the time to prepare for the rainy season. Consider places on your farm, where pastures stay wet or flood, where gutters overflow (or just don't exist), and where you plan to have your animals overwinter. These fall tips will help get your farm ready for the WET season!

Pastures

- Avoid overgrazing as grass growth slows in August through October. Overgrazing can lead to compaction, which increases runoff, and a lack of surface cover which slows down water for infiltration and captures pollutants.
- Make plans to move animals from pastures that become saturated in the fall and winter. Animals on wet fields can compact the soils and damage pastures.
- Follow appropriate seasonal manure application setback guidelines for pasturing animals. Just like manure spreading equipment, animals are applying manure to your fields. Check and follow the setback distances that apply to you (e.g. manure application setbacks, Critical Areas Ordinance, or Department of Ecology exclusion). The Whatcom Conservation District can help you determine the appropriate setbacks.

Barn Gutters

- Check and repair roof panels, gutters, and downspouts or install barn gutters if you don't have them. Diverting roof water away from heavy use or manured areas can improve animal health and protect surface water.

Heavy Use Areas

- Make sure your sacrifice, or heavy use, areas are ready for animals. Order and install hog fuel, wood chips, or other footing materials. that will reduce mud and protect footing.
- Consider where your heavy use area drains. Runoff is best treated through a grassed or vegetated area.



Attending a Farm Speaker Series Workshop is the first step towards your \$200 rebate for barn gutters or heavy use area footing. Check <https://www.whatcomcd.org/speaker-series> for more information.

Nutrient Applications

- Get your manure out on the fields early. Be sure your manure pile has been spread or your lagoon is empty in early October when field and weather is lower risk. Check with the Whatcom Conservation District's [Manure Spreading Advisory](#) and inquire about borrowing their manure spreader.
- Follow seasonal manure application setback guidelines. In September, the setback is **40 feet** from all waterways and swales. The setback moves to **80 feet** from October through the high risk winter months.
- Apply at agronomic rates. Grass doesn't need many nutrients going into the winter and cover crops likely don't need any when planted behind an annual crop . Contact the Whatcom Conservation District for a soil test.
- Sign up for manure text alerts to get notices of significant weather events and manure application tips. Text "EZManure" to 797979.
- Cover manure storage or compost system. As the rains begin, cover your manure pile with a tarp or roof structure. This preserves your hard-earned nutrients and reduces runoff from your farm. Contact the Whatcom Conservation District for a free tarp.

Cover Crops

- Plant your cover crop as soon as annual crops are harvested. Cover crops reduce nutrient and sediment transport through fall and winter months.

Fall is the perfect time to get your farm winter ready and Whatcom Conservation District can help. Whatcom Conservation District is the resource in Whatcom County for information on rebates and grants for farm improvements, technical assistance, and an equipment loan program. Additionally, they provide complementary soil tests and tarps for manure piles. Attending a Farm Speaker Series Workshop is the first step towards your \$200 rebate for barn gutters or heavy use area footing.

For more information about Whatcom Conservation District programs, visit <https://www.whatcomcd.org/> or call (360) 526-2381.

Tips for Pet Waste

Pets do not use a toilet or pick up after themselves. Besides being gross to step in, bacteria from pet waste left on trails, lawns, and even the woods can wash into stormdrains, ditches, and creeks when the rain comes.. Like human poop, pet poop is raw sewage that contains pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites which can transmit disease to people. Some of these pathogens can last for years in the environment or your backyard.

- Scoop, Bag, and Trash it!
- Become a steward, install a sign, and share bags with others.

For more information about pet waste programs, visit www.whatcomcounty.us/scooppoop or call Whatcom County Public Works at (360) 778-6230.

Tips for Septic Systems

Regular evaluations and maintenance of your septic system can help you find problems early on and avoid large costs associated with repairs. Each septic system is designed to process a specific amount of wastewater each day. When too much water goes through your system in a short period of time the solids in the wastewater don't have enough time to settle in the tank. The solids make their way into the drainfield and can eventually cause you expensive problems. Here are some specific tips that will help keep excess water out of your septic system and protect your property.

- Repair leaking toilet flappers. A worn out toilet flapper can allow water to leak from the toilet tank to the toilet bowl. These leaks often go unnoticed and could send hundreds of gallons of additional water through your septic system each day. It's cheap and quick to fix! Tips to locate and repair a leaking toilet flapper can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/fix-leak-week>.
- Divert runoff/downspouts. Divert water away from your septic system, including your drainfield. Check that gutters and downspouts are in place and direct water away from these areas. Drainfields typically fail because too much water, entering from the house, an outside source or both, has been flushed into them, keeping them constantly saturated. A drainfield that is failing is no longer treating sewage properly and must be replaced.
- Spread out the timing of your laundry loads. Try to do laundry throughout the week and avoid 'laundry catch up days'. Modern high-efficiency washing machines can use between 10 and 20 gallons of water per load. Older top loading washing machines can use up to 40 gallons per load. Washing 5 loads of laundry in one day could send more than 200 gallons of water through your septic system .



For more information about septic systems, visit www.whatcomcounty.us/septic or call the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 778-6000. For rebate information , visit www.co.whatcom.wa.us/2257/Septic-Maintenance-Rebate-Program.

Tips for Boats and Recreational Vehicles

If you are returning from your last summer trip or thinking about getting an early start on winterizing, remember to use a pump out station. Discharging black or gray water onto a field, into a stormdrain, or into a waterway is not a solution! Protect your family, neighbors, and waterways and make use of the sanitary disposal options below:

- Pumpout Stations for Boats: <https://pumpoutwashington.org/>
- Department of Transportation links to dump stations for RVs <https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/travel/safety/rest-areas/rv-dump-stations>

Tips for Wildlife

Larger than natural populations of wildlife, such as raccoons, can be a source of bacteria in creeks. When people make food and shelter easily accessible to wildlife, animals can increase their populations above natural levels.

- Do not feed wildlife. Secure pet food, garbage, and compost from wildlife.
- Block off crawl spaces and attic vents from wildlife access.

For more information about wildlife, visit <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/2916/I-See-Urban-Wildlife>.



The Whatcom Clean Water Program is a partnership of local, state, tribal and federal organizations working to reduce fecal bacteria in Whatcom County surface waters and restore shellfish growing areas. Learn more about this [partnership](#).