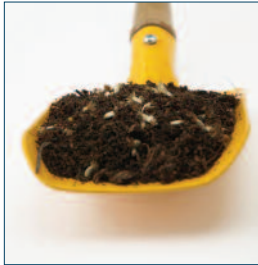
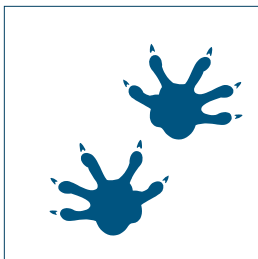


Getting Your Backyard Ready for Spring More is Not Always Better



Soil testing not only helps your lawn but helps your wallet! You can waste a lot of money by fertilizing when you don't need to!



Seen these tracks around your neighborhood? Read inside to see what interesting animal of southern New Castle County they belong to.



We're looking for photographs of southern New Castle County's amazing outdoor environment so get out there, take pictures, and enter them in our photography contest!

As spring arrives, many of you will be thinking about getting outdoors and making your backyard beautiful or looking to hire someone to take care of it for you. Take a moment to learn how to take care of your yard while not polluting the natural wonders of our waterways or wasting your money!

Most people want a nice lush green lawn, free of weeds and ready for summer barbecues which can mean fertilizing. If you use too much fertilizer or apply it at the wrong time, it can easily wash off your lawn or garden into storm drains. From storm drains, fertilizers flow untreated into lakes and streams. Just like in your garden, fertilizer in lakes and streams makes plants grow. In water bodies, extra fertilizer can mean extra algae and aquatic plant growth. Too much algae harms water quality and makes boating, fishing and swimming unpleasant because as algae decays,

they use up oxygen in the water that fish and other wildlife need.

To prevent this from happening, never apply more fertilizer than is recommended. In the case of fertilizers a little is good, but more is not better! Too much fertilizer can burn your lawn and cause problems for the environment. Also, do not just fertilize because you believe that you should. Make sure to test your soil annually to show you whether or not your lawn actually needs that extra fertilization and if so, how much. Fall is the best time to fertilize so if you're planning on fertilizing in the spring, do a soil test first to make sure you aren't wasting your money!

Follow these other tips to make your backyard beautiful and safe for the environment and your family:

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**Appoquinimink
River Association**

www.apporiver.org





Critter Corner

Opossum

There are many amazing creatures living throughout our area and in our communities that we'll be highlighting in upcoming newsletters. This edition's Critter Corner will showcase the opossum!

Opossums found in the area nest in burrows abandoned by other creatures, hollow logs or other sheltered places in forested areas close to water. The opossum is the only marsupial, animal that carries its young in a belly pouch, in North America. Females can bear up to 18 per litter with a gestation of less than two weeks. The young are then carried for the next two months in the mother's pouch which has a



vertical entrance so the babies can suckle from one of the mother's 13 nipples.

Opossums have long, hairless tails which can be used to grab branches and small animals. However, they do not use the tail to hang from because they are not strong enough to support their weight. They

have hairless ears and 50 teeth, the most among land mammals. Opossum fur is very soft and was once used in the bathtub as a sponge.

Species of opossum found in Delaware are noted for their involuntary reaction to threat, which is to simulate death. The opossum will enter a near coma, which can last up to four hours where it lies on its side, mouth and eyes open, tongue hanging out, with green fluid and a putrid odor emitting to ward off predators. This is the genesis of the term "playing (o)possum".

Opossums have a remarkable robust immune system and show partial or total immunity to the venom of rattlesnakes, cottonmouths and other pit vipers. Thanks to their lower blood pressure, rabies is almost unknown in opossums. In addition, opossums were once widely consumed in the United States as evidenced by recipes containing their meat as an ingredient in early editions of the "Joy of Cooking".

The Most Important Backyard Tool You Should Be Using But You Aren't

Soil tests will help you develop and maintain the best lawn by providing information about the fertility of your soil. Information from a soil test will help you select the proper maintenance program to obtain optimal growth of lawn and garden.

In addition, it will help protect water quality by making sure that you are not overfertilizing and washing fertilizer into storm drains and then directly into our waterways.

Soils can be tested any time during the year; however, be sure to sample well before planting or spring green-up. Generally fall is the best time to sample soils, because landscapes and gardens are usually dry enough to till when sampling.

Soil sample kits can be purchased from the University of Delaware Soil Testing Program, Department of Plant and Soil Science at (302) 831-1392 (ag.udel.edu/other_websites/DSTP/). Soil sample bags and other pertinent information are also available at the New Castle Cooperative Extension Office (302) 831-2506.

Backyard

Continued from page 1

- Never apply fertilizer to frozen ground or before a rain storm as it will run off before it can be absorbed.
- Sweep up fertilizers off sidewalks and driveways where it can easily wash into storm drains and gutters.
- Use commercially available compost or make your own using your kitchen and garden waste. Mixing compost with your soil means your plants will need less chemical fertilizer and puts your waste to good use.



- Let your grass clippings lay. Don't bag the grass and direct clippings back into the lawn to avoid the street, sidewalks or bodies of water.
- Maintain a buffer strip of unmowed natural vegetation bordering waterways and ponds. This traps excess fertilizers and soil from our lawns and gardens and keeps them out of waterways.
- When mowing, remove no more than one-third of the grass height allowing the height to remain between 2.5 – 4 inches. Cutting off more than this at one time can stop the roots from growing and would require frequent watering during dry summers to keep the plants alive.

The Importance of Mulch to a Healthy Garden

A Friend to Your Soil

Mulching involves placing a layer of organic material around plants. As mulch decomposes, it adds organic matter to the soil. This provides important nutrients for plants and an ideal environment for earthworms and other organisms that help enrich the soil.



Mulching provides nutrients for earthworms and other soil-enriching organisms.

Mulching can also recycle yard wastes and improve your soil at the same time. Mulch protects soil from erosion, prevents weed growth, conserves soil moisture, stabilizes soil temperature, and reduces compaction.

The best place to look for mulch materials is in your own yard. Grass clippings and leaves work well for mulching if they are dry and weed free. Avoid adding clippings to your vegetable garden from lawns that have been treated with weed killer within the last two mowings. Wood chips and bark also work well around trees and shrubs and make attractive walkways through gardens.

Apply mulch when plants are established and soil is warm. First, water your garden well. Then place a layer of mulch around the plants to help protect the soil.



Natural Wonders Photography Contest

Enter Now — Deadline Approaching!

With a colorful fall and a snow filled winter, we hope that you were out capturing the beauty of southern New Castle County with your cameras to enter in the Association's Natural Wonders Photography Contest. As a reminder, you can submit photographs in the following categories:

Landscapes

Waterscapes

Native Wildlife

Native Plants

Ways to Protect Our Waterways

April 30 is the deadline so remember you need to mail an unframed, white matted 8" x 10" photograph to the Association at 2430 Old County Road, Newark DE 19702 along with emailing the same photograph in digital .jpeg format to info@apporiver.org. Entry fees are \$5 per photograph and \$25 for 6 photographs and must be submitted with photographs. Please visit www.apporiver.org for all the rules and directions for submission.

Prizes include an awards ceremony and reception for all participants at the Gibby Center for the Arts in Middletown where the top three photographs in each category will be displayed! Cash prizes will be presented for the top winners!

Visit www.apporiver.org for the official rules and more detailed information about the contest or call 302-382-0335!

Just for Fun SOLVE THE PUZZLE

O U	F E R	O I L	S A V	T E	V I R
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Unscramble the tiles above to reveal a message.

Save money and the environment by testing your soil before you fertilize!

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