

Every day more Georgians are going green. We're paying attention to our environment and taking notice of the impact we have on it in our daily lives. If you've been wondering how you can join in, we've got a few ideas you can start with at home.

One example is through native landscaping. Native species are more adapted to local conditions and do not require fertilizers, pesticides, or supplemental irrigation once plants are established. This reduces your impact on our water supply and the amount of chemicals entering the environment. Native grasses have an extensive root structure which allows for better water absorption, filtering of pollutants and soil stabilization. Native plants will also provide extremely valuable habitat for many species and help protect the biodiversity of the coastal region.

Another way to live Green is through conserving water. Using rain barrels is a great way to do your part. The average U.S. household uses 146,000 gallons of water per year with up to 50% of that water going towards outdoor irrigation during the summer months. We should be conserving our treated drinking water for those things we really need it for. Consider using collected rainwater for your outdoor water uses. With an average annual

rainfall of nearly 50 inches, there is a huge potential to harvest rainwater in coastal Georgia. With our average rainfall amounts, if you were to harvest everything that fell on a small 1000 square foot rooftop area you could collect almost 40,000 gallons of water each year!

Rain barrels are relatively simple and inexpensive to construct and can sit conveniently under any residential gutter down spout. Placed under one of your downspouts, rain barrels collect rainwater that you can use to water gardens and lawns, wash cars, or even fill birdbaths and ponds.

Your plants also prefer rainwater to the treated water that comes from your city or county water treatment plant. Rainwater has a more neutral pH and temperature, and is free of added minerals and chemicals that may affect your plants. Make your plants happy by watering them with rainwater!

Have a larger roof area? Larger cisterns are another great option for harvesting rainwater. These cisterns can collect up to 6,000 gallons of rainwater from this rooftop which is used to wash boats, trailers and field gear. Our rooftop is approximately 3,830 square feet. With 1" inch of rainfall, these cisterns will capture 2,267 gallons of water. In addition to conserving water by using rainwater for some outdoor uses,

you are also helping to limit pollution through something called stormwater runoff.

Stormwater runoff is the number one cause of pollution in our streams today. Rainfall that flows off impervious surfaces such as rooftops, roads, and parking lots pick up pollutants including fertilizers, pet waste, motor oil, sediment and other contaminants. Usually runoff is routed to a nearby storm drain, which then enters our coastal streams untreated, causing pollution problems in our local waterways. This water is also very warm as it flows over hot asphalt and concrete- especially in the summer months. And all of this eventually enters our fragile coastal estuaries which are our most productive areas for coastal fisheries and recreation. The influx of additional freshwater as well as the pollutants and warmer temperatures are causing major problems in these sensitive areas.

An alternative is to encourage the rainwater to infiltrate back into the ground onsite through Low Impact Development (LID) techniques such as rainwater harvesting, bioswales, bioretention, and permeable pavement. By using the rainwater on plants and other vegetated area on your property you are keeping the water onsite instead of letting it runoff and become stormwater pollution.

A bioswale is a depressional area designed to capture and treat stormwater runoff from an adjacent impervious surface such as this parking lot. The native grasses planted here will help filter pollutants out of the stormwater and assist in removing some of the water through evapotranspiration. This is a great alternative to routing parking lot runoff directly to a storm drain. A bioswale can greatly reduce stormwater pollution.

So now you have a place to start on your journey towards a greener life! You can feel good in knowing that taking action around your home can lead to tangible improvements in the quality of the environment. Be sure to check out more ideas, including a step-by-step guide on constructing a rain barrel system for your home on the Coastal Resources Division website.

Stay green and we'll see you at CoastFest 2021!