Town & Country

Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District

Fall 2014

Fall is a Great Time to Fight Invasive Honeysuckle

The leaves of the Asian Bush Honeysuckle are rounded coming to a point. The familiar red berries are high in sugars instead of the fat and protein needed by migratory birds.

Spring flowers (below) are yellow and white.

Asian Honeysuckle is an invasive shrub that is easy to identify in the fall. As shown in the photo on the left, the Asian Bush Honeysuckle is still bright green where as the trees are bare or with autumn leaves. The honeysuckle is our most common invasive plant in central Indiana.

What's the problem with Asian bush honeysuckle?
They sap moisture and nutrients from other plants and shade out young native plants.

How did they get here?
Like many invasive plants, Asian bush honeysuckle was introduced to America with good intentions. Through the 50's, 60's, and 70's Asian honeysuckle was promoted a s a great ornamental landscaping shrub, erosion control, and wildlife cover. Unfortunately, Asian bush honeysuckle spread aggressively and form dense thickets that shade everything else out. Additionally, these shrubs leave wildlife exposed to predators and their berries have no nutritional value for birds.

What can we do?
For established shrubs, the honeysuckle can be cut off to ground level and the exposed stub dabbed with glysophate. You can also spay the bush with glysophate or brush killer. When spraying, be careful not to overspray on adjacent plants. Be sure to read and follow all herbicide label instructions. Keep in mind that all infestations are different and it may take multiple applications over several growing seasons to eradicate Asian bush honeysuckle on your property.

After you have removed invasives, consider restoring your land with native shrubs or wildflowers. Remember, your SWCD is here to help !

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Soil & Water
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Published quarterly and distributed to landowners, farm operators, teachers, local agencies, public officials, conservation organizations and other interested individuals.

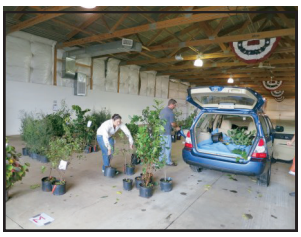
Plat Books Available

2014 Plat Books are available for purchase at the Soil and Water Conservation District office. Plat books (or plat maps) are directories of the county that list owners of each parcel. Each plat book contains a county highway map, diagram of townships, a general soil map, city street maps, township maps, an index of owners to help you locate parcel ownership, and more. 2014 plat books are $20.00 a piece plus tax. Some older versions are available in the office at lower cost as well.

Plat books can be purchased with cash or check in our office Monday-Friday from 8am-4:30pm. Marking flags, tile probes, and rain barrels are also available.

Plat books make a great Christmas gift or stocking stuffer!

Tree Sale Roundup



Over 350 trees were sold in the 2014 tree sale. Thirty varieties of native trees and shrubs were offered. Most trees were 3-5 feet tall at delivery and in three gallon plastic containers. This size tree is easy to load into a car or truck and convenient to move around your property and plant. For tree pick up, customers drive directly into the lama barn at the 4-H Fairgrounds and load their pre-sorted order directly into their vehicle.

The 2015 native tree sale will kick off in July of next year. If there is a specific native tree or shrub variety you would like to see on the tree sale list, please let us know and we can make a note to try to offer that species.

Special thanks to everyone who purchased trees in the 2014 tree sale. Income from the tree sale supports SWCD educational efforts and programming.

Hamilton County Farmers Participate In 2nd Year Nitrogen Study

Mark McCauley, Resource Conservationist

Once again several farmers across Hamilton County chose to voluntarily participate in a nitrogen study, which ultimately could provide environmental benefits and financial savings to the farmer as well as county residents. Soil and Water District staff have been busy collecting corn stalk samples ahead of harvest this Fall on 16 different sites across Hamilton County, involving 118 different sampling points, with 10 stalk samples taken at each point. This program is basically an "on-farm" study to evaluate nitrogen use efficiency in corn, and is called the Indiana On-Farm Network program.

Participating farmers use precision ag tools and technologies to conduct research on their own farms. Through the On-Farm Network®, farmers use this data from their own farms and others in their area to evaluate the effectiveness and economic pros and cons of different management practices, such as nutrient application rates, timing, and form. Farmers not only evaluate the effectiveness of different practices on their own farm, but benefit from aggregate data across multiple farms and years. The end result is farmer-driven adaptive management in real time – farmers gathering and making beneficial changes based on data from their own fields and those of others. The farmers are in the driver's seat, which significantly increases buy in to the results and willingness to make long-term changes.

One of the technical aspects of the program is the testing of corn stalks at harvest to measure nitrogen levels not utilized in producing the grain. This would appear to indicate that the corn crop had more nitrogen than needed to produce that years crop, so a reduction in the amount applied might be a wise decision. Additionally, unused nitrogen does have the potential to move off the field in storm water runoff, and farmers do not want that to happen either. The bottom line is that applying nitrogen at rates close to what the crop uses not only saves money but helps improve and protect the environment as well. We continue to be encouraged by famers in Hamilton County for taking proactive steps that benefit us all on several levels.

If you are a farmer or know of a farmer interested in participating in a study like this, please call us at 317-773-2181 and we can discuss this with you further. There is no cost to the farmer, but there is a great deal of site specific valuable information provided back to him for use in his operation. Let us know if you are interested.

Winter Away List

If you plan to be away for winter, please give us a call at 317-773-2181 or email at soil.water@hamiltoncounty.in.gov so we can create a "winter away" list for our winter newsletter. Help us save postage and return postage money while you are enjoying warmer temperatures!

Conservation in the City—Fall Creek Watershed Partnership

Leslie White, FCWP BYC Coordinator

A wide variety of green infrastructure is peppered throughout the Fall Creek Watershed. You can visit many of these urban conservation practices. Drop by McCordsville's Town Hall Park to see conservation cover of native wildflowers, pervious pavers, and native tree plantings. Spend a day at Ft. Harrison State Park Visitor Center to view the demonstration rain garden and rain barrel. Stop at the Millersville Retention Pond near 56th Street and Emerson Way to view the invasive removal making way for pond edge enhancements of native plantings that stabilize the shoreline and reduce erosion and sedimentation. Just downstream on the 5300 Block of Fall Creek Parkway Drive North view firsthand how residents addressed drainage and flooding issues at the edge of their driveway and street by constructing a dry creek bed and bioswale with native plantings and a gravel reservoir that infiltrate stormwater runoff during heavy rains. Closer into the City is a gorgeous and functional rain garden at Broadway United Methodist Church that intercepts thousands of gallons of runoff from the enormous slate roof. More rain gardens capture, cleanse and recharge runoff at Historic Meridian Park and Highland Vicinity Neighborhood while urban gardens are springing forth to offer garden beds and access to fresh food at 29th and Capitol Greenspace and Gardens, 30th and Park Urban patch and many other communities. Fall Creek Gardens Urban Growers Resource Center offers courses and garden plots and showcases conservation practices including composting, mulching, rain water harvesting with rain barrels and a 3,000 gallon above-ground cistern, and a bioswale designed to intercept and infiltrate cistern overflow. Don't miss the green roof on the Ruckle Street Shelter.

Focusing on a specific area along Fall Creek, Midtown's location between the Fall Creek and White River watersheds is lush and verdant but after a downpour many lawns and paved areas turn into ponds. Denny Krauser and his wife Catherine live on Fall Creek Parkway and after rain events frequently had drainage and flooding issues at the end of their driveway. "Water would pool for a day or two where our driveway meets the street, making it difficult to enter and exit," Krauser said. When he learned that Fall Creek Watershed Partnership's Backyard Conservation Program offers free site assessments and conservation plans, he approached program coordinator Leslie White and asked for help. On a free site visit, she suggested installing a bio-swale: a shallow drainage channel covered with dense vegetation of native plants that helps soak up runoff from streets, drives, roofs and other hard surfaces. According to White, bio-swales are designed to trap particulate pollutants (suspended solids and trace metals), protect soil, promote infiltration, and reduce the flow velocity of storm water runoff. "Bio-swales add beautiful landscaping to a yard, attract wildlife, and protect our overloaded urban streams and sewers at the same time," White said. The bio-swale was designed as part of the conservation planning process, which included a site assessment and survey, soils map, stormwater volume calculations, suggested grading, plant and materials recommendations, as well as maintenance instructions. Once installed, stormwater was guided away from the driveway. "We don't have a problem now," Krauser said, "rather a beautiful and functional landscaping feature in our yard that attracts lovely butterflies and birds." White and the Partnership team provide technical assistance and speak to neighborhood and community association groups, churches, municipalities, MS4s, gardening clubs, economic development organizations and businesses. The Partnership is comprised of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Hamilton, Hancock, Madison and Marion Counties. District staff and White have been busy working with neighbors in the Fall Creek region providing conservation plans and overseeing installations of rain gardens and bio-swales at sites such as Broadway United Methodist Church, Fall Creek Gardens, and at residences in Historic Meridian Park and Highland Vicinity neighborhoods as well as in Anderson, Fishers, Fortville, Ingalls, Lawrence, McCordsville, and Pendleton. The Indiana Conservation Partnership helps lift these efforts by offering additional resources. The Fall Creek Watershed Partnership's urban / backyard conservation program is supported by Clean Water Indiana grants through the Indiana State Department of Agriculture / Division of Soil Conservation. To schedule a presentation or for technical guidance and resources to help with practices that support healthy soils, clean water and natural resources contact leslie-white@iaswcd.org or call 317-773-2181.

The Krauser's dry creek bed and bioswale at Millersville

Backyard Conservation Spotlight

Claire Lane, Backyard Conservation Coordinator

Putting Your Garden to Bed & Cover Crop Workshop
Cover Crop Test Plots at Community Garden

This fall, the SWCD partnered with the Carmel Clay Schools Plots to Plates Community Garden and the Hamilton County Master Gardeners Association to present a fall gardening workshop. The workshop covered putting your garden to bed and cover crops for residential gardens. Hamilton County Master Gardener Chris Cruzan covered topics like removal and disposal of plant material, soil amendments, and weed prevention. Next, we had a brief discussion on cover crops and how they apply to the residential garden led by Claire Lane. Sample packets of oat cover crop seeds were distributed for use on garden plots. Farmers have been using cover crops for many years to improve yields and soil quality, limit erosion, prevent weeds and more. Many of these benefits can be enjoyed by residential gardeners but it's important to note that all cover crops aren't created equal. It's important to research different cover crops and match them to your needs, next season planting plans, and goals for your garden.

Things to consider:

Over winter vs. winter kill — Some cover crops, are killed by frost (winter kill) while others survive our harsh winters. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. In our case, the Plots to Plates Community Garden is an organic gardens so plot holders would be unable to use herbicides to kill cover crops that overwinter. Therefore, winter kill cover crops were selected.

Select cover crops based on needs— Some cover crops help prevent weeds (ex. buckwheat), some add nitrogen to the soil (ex. winter peas), and some fight soil compaction (ex. radish). It's important that you match your garden needs with the proper cover crop.

Benefits of Cover Crops

- Add organic matter
- Suppress weeds
- Improve soil structure (create pores, increase aeration, moisture holding capacity)
- Regulate soil temp and moisture
- Take up Nitrogen otherwise lost to leaching
- Prevent erosion from wind, water, and snow.
- Break up pest and disease cycles

Use of cover crops in residential or urban gardens is still fairly new. To evaluate the successes and benefits of several cover crop mixtures, the SWCD partnered with the Plots to Plates Community Garden to seed 6 community garden plots with different mixtures of cover crops. Mixtures of winter peas, radish, turnip, and oats were planted and will continue to be evaluated through the fall and winter. The SWCD and garden leadership will evaluate the success of different mixtures and seeding rates as well as overall benefits gained from the use of cover crops. Carmel Clay Schools students will be able to view and learn about cover crops during field trips to the garden. We hope this information will help us determine the best cover crops and mixtures to use in this setting moving forward.

Master Gardener, Chris Cruzan, speaks with workshop participants regarding putting your garden to bed for the season.

For more information on cover crops and to see how they may enhance your gardening efforts, contact the SWCD. As always, keep an eye on this newsletter and our website for info on upcoming workshops.

Conservation Improvements Throughout Hamilton County

John South, District Manager

Field Border

Field Border is a conservation practice that provides multiply benefits: Stops erosion on the end rows, wildlife habitat, pollinator habitat and improves the soil. Field borders are often located where crop production is marginal or where a buffer is needed. Especially along a forested area crops are not very productive. Cost share funds through CRP will help pay for installation and provide an annual rental payment for cropland taken out of production.

The SWCD staff has been involved with the layout and construction of five **grass waterways** this fall. New gullies cross many fields. Shaping, no-tillage in the drainage way and cover crops are all practical solutions to stop gullies. However, the best long term solution is to grade and seed to grass. John South will assist you with design, where to get materials and a contractor list. NRCS also works with FSA to provide a cost sharing program through CRP. Funding will pay for approximately 70% of the construction cost and provide an annual rental payment for cropland taken out of production. These payments exceed $200/acre for good soils.

Grass Waterway after Shaping and Seeding

Pond Edge Enhancements - This project was funded by the Hamilton County SWCD Backyard Conservation Program.

Ponds can be enhanced by adding herbaceous plants at the perimeter. Plants that grow well in wet conditions are planned along the water and progressively dryer plants are planted on the banks. Benefits include reduced shoreline erosion, wildlife habitat, aesthesis, nutrient removal from the water and runoff flowing into the pond. A wider planting will also discourage geese from the pond.

Cover crop is a n agronomic practice that builds organic material, prevents soil erosion, feeds earthworms, breaks up compaction and scavenges left over nitrogen. Planting cover crops on drainage ways is an excellent way to reduce gullies caused by late winter rains. There is a wide variety of crops that can be planted before September 15th. As the season gets shorter the number dwindles. Google Cover Crop Council for recommendations.

Cereal Rye was used for a **cover crop** on this field in the floodplain. The farmer hopes the cereal rye will protect the field during floods and reduce stubble movement.

Hamilton County Soil & Water
Conservation District
1717 Pleasant Street, Suite 100
Noblesville, IN 46060
(317) 773-2181
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Save the Date

The 2015 Hamilton County SWCD Annual Meeting will take place February 26th, 2015.

Look for details on speakers and educational sessions in the winter newsletter or on our website.

If your organization or business is interested in having a vendor table at our annual meeting, please email soil.water@hamiltoncounty.in.gov or call 317-773-2181.

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