Springtime Tips for Healthy Soil

Spring is right around the corner! As you prepare to tackle your lawn, garden and landscape beds this season, keep in mind the health of our watershed and environment. The key to a lush lawn and vibrant plants is healthy soil. Did you know that a teaspoon of healthy soil contains as many as **four billion** beneficial microorganisms? Composting, mulching, and using the right fertilizers are simple things you can do on your own to promote healthy soil and clean water.

- Composting allows you to recycle the nutrients found within your kitchen scraps (e.g., vegetable trimmings, fruit skins, egg shells), as well as in your yard waste, which reduces the chance for debris washing into local streams. Furthermore, making and utilizing your own compost can reduce your dependency of using chemical fertilizers.

- Mulch feeds the soil, conserves water, and prevents weed growth. Add a layer of organic material such as leaves, wood chips, compost or grass clippings around your plants this spring, being sure to keep it about an inch away from the base of plants.

- Although chemical fertilizers and pesticides green our lawns and expel unwanted pests, they can also be harmful to all those microorganisms, which are vital to maintaining healthy soil. Prior to applying any fertilizer, have your soil tested. Once you know which nutrients your soil is in need of, consider natural organic alternatives such as blood meal, fish bone meal, alfalfa meal, or compost. If you must fertilize, choose carefully. Look for "phosphorous-free" fertilizers and organic or "slow release" fertilizers, which are less likely to be washed into our streams and rivers when it rains. Lastly, be sure to follow all storage and use directions.

For more information on composting, mulching, organic fertilizers and soil testing, contact The Ohio State University Extension, at 216-429-8200, or go to www.cuyahoga.osu.edu. To learn more about your watershed, visit the Tinker's Creek Watershed website at www.tinkerscreekwatershed.org.