



Fall Drainage Tips for a Healthier Watershed

Fall is the season of cleanup! Gutters to clear, leaves to manage, and gardens to put to bed. But before the ground freezes, it's also one of the best times of year to take a hard look at where the rainwater and snowmelt from your roof and yard is going. A little attention now can prevent a lot of stormwater runoff and a lot of water quality problems all year long.

Start at the Roof and Clean Your Gutters

Clogged gutters overflow, sending concentrated sheets of water off your roofline and straight onto the ground below. That water erodes soil, saturates your foundation, and can find its way to the nearest storm drain. Clean your gutters after the leaves have fallen and make sure downspouts are clear and fully attached. While you're at it, check that downspout extensions direct water at least four to six feet away from your foundation.



Rethink Where Your Downspouts Drain

Many homes have downspouts that empty directly onto driveways, sidewalks, or into underground pipes connected to the storm sewer. This means roof runoff, carrying whatever has accumulated on your shingles, moves directly into local waterways with no opportunity to soak in. Disconnecting your downspout from the storm sewer system and redirecting it onto a vegetated area of your yard is one of the highest-impact, lowest-cost changes a homeowner can make for stormwater.

A few simple options:

- Route downspouts into a rain barrel for storage. Even in fall, collected water can be used on gardens before the first hard freeze.
- Direct downspouts into a rain garden planted with deep-rooted native species that can handle periodic flooding and filter runoff naturally.

Keep Leaves Out of the Storm Drain

Leaf litter washed into storm drains and ditches breaks down in waterways and releases phosphorus, the same nutrient that fuels harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Keep storm drains near your property clear, especially during heavy rain events. If your community offers curbside leaf collection, wait to rake leaves to the curb until close to your pickup day to minimize the chance they'll wash away. Leaves can also be mulched in place with your mower or composted in your yard, both keep nutrients on your property rather than washing into the watershed.



Fall is the Right Time to Act

The connections between your roof, your yard, and your local streams are more direct than most realize. Every downspout you redirect, every drain you keep clear, and every bare patch of soil you seed this fall is a small action with a real downstream effect. For resources on downspout disconnection, rain gardens, and other stormwater improvements, visit crwp.org.