By Pauline Loewenhardt

Did you know your home address includes your watershed? Everyone lives in a watershed, defined as all the land that is drained by the river system of that watershed. This is the big picture behind efforts to keep our streams, creeks, and rivers clean and flowing. It is also something we can all get involved in, regardless of if we live in a big apartment complex or a house of any size.

Yes, there are some big polluters, but the major source of pollution to our creeks, ponds, and streams is stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces. Impervious surfaces are streets, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots, and roofs of homes and other buildings. Water runs off these surfaces and into the storm drains, as opposed to pervious surfaces like forests where rain can soak into the ground.

As rainwater flows over developed land it picks up a variety of pollutants, including eroded soil, trash, dog waste, fertilizers, and pesticides from our lawns and gardens, automobile fluids that leak onto streets such as brake fluid which contains trace metals and chemicals. When this polluted rainwater washes into the storm sewer, it goes straight into the streams and rivers of our watershed.

Protecting the quality of our water is everyone’s job. One of the ways we can protect water is to support the installation of rain gardens. A rain garden is a bowl-shaped bio retention system devised to mimic systems found in nature. Before settlers cleared the land and built communities, rain was naturally filtered through soils, roots, and plants in our native forests, wetlands, and meadows. Rain gardens originated in Prince George’s County, Maryland, and developed in conjunction with the University of Maryland in the mid-90s, and have since spread all over the country. They are featured in many other countries as well.

If you are interested in learning more, sign up for the fall Master Rain Garden class, which during the pandemic, is free of charge. You will earn your certificate by taking the class and building a rain garden. You will also receive a free Master Rain Gardener T-shirt, and be able to help friends and neighbors learn about, design, and install a rain garden. What we are after, says Susan Bryan, the Washtenaw County Rain Garden Coordinator, is the “ripple effect,” where word spreads among those who become involved after seeing a neighbor’s rain garden. If you go to the Washtenaw County site you can view the class syllabus, and some fun videos with singing and dancing about rain gardens and what they do.

Bryan developed the Master Rain Gardener program and has spread it to six other municipalities. You can drive or walk along Miller Avenue in Ann Arbor and see the rain gardens she designed for that community. Perhaps you have noticed one in your neighborhood? Your neighbor would probably be happy to talk to you and answer your questions. Bryan has a Master of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Michigan and is a Master Gardener, and past President of Wild Ones. You can contact her at bryans@washtenawcounty.org.
Welcome to September! September is my favorite month of the year. I not only celebrate my birthday, and my husband’s birthday, and our wedding anniversary, but it has also, for the last 20 years, been the restart of having a consistent schedule after summer break from school.

Like many, I flourish with a consistent schedule. My day doesn’t have to be scheduled to the minute, but I like waking up and knowing what my day will look like. This year has been a year of unexpected happenings—a trial for those of us who like to plan for the future. My hope is that if you are one of my flock, you’ve been able to find some consistency in the inconsistency, too.

Even though I am a scheduler, I remind myself often, that good things happen in the unexpected, too. I’ve been trying to say yes to things more often than no, and not get stuck in the space of “but” or “if”. The pandemic has taught me a lot about myself, and I am moving forward with things I have long planned, but never scheduled.

I’d love to hear from you about the dreams and goals you’ve moved forward on during our “great pause.” You can write to me at jennifer@crazywisdom.net.

Jennifer Carson