

## GET BAY-WISE CERTIFIED AND HELP SAVE THE BAY

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*[second in a two-part series on how you can help improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay]*

In March, the Master Gardeners’ column discussed why the Chesapeake Bay needs your help, focusing on how agricultural impact, air pollution, chemical contamination, habitat degradation, and forest losses have negatively impacted the health of the Bay. Among the most urgent concerns for the health of the Chesapeake Bay are dead zones in the bay, and air- and waterborne pollution. Much is being done, but more needs to be done to improve the Bay.

**How can you protect this regional, national and world treasure?** Through your own adoption of best practices in your landscape and gardens, such as controlling the stormwater runoff from your own property. In the process, you can become Bay-Wise certified. If everyone does his or her part, the bay will recover and these dead zones will decrease or even disappear.

**How can you become Bay-Wise certified?** Certifications are done April through October, and currently are all virtual. Check your practices against the Master Gardener guidelines for Bay-Wise property certification, the “Bay-Wise Maryland Yardstick.” If you compile at least 36 inches (i.e., points) on the Yardstick list, e-mail the Yardstick and four to six high-definition photos of your yard/garden to <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environment-natural-resources/program-areas/ume-bay-wise-program/links-resources-and-publications>. Master gardeners will review your Yardstick list and pictures. If your yard/garden is certified, you will receive a certificate and a metal sign and post to show you are Baywise-certified, signifying to your neighbors your commitment to the health of the Bay. See more details at [Bay-Wise MD Landscape Certification - YouTube](#).

There are a number of property-specific factors (see below) to consider in doing your part to help save the bay. Not all factors will apply to all properties.

### Control stormwater runoff

- Direct water from gutters/downspouts to garden beds to prevent runoff.
- Plant groundcovers in thinly vegetated areas.
- Use porous approaches to walkways/driveways to absorb runoff.
- Install mulched beds on the lower edges of your property.
- Install a rain garden or rain barrels to capture rainwater runoff.

### Protect the waterfront

- Establish a low-maintenance border near all ponds, streams, etc., to slow runoff.
- Use native grasses with deep root systems.

### Mow properly/water efficiently

- Use an electric mower to reduce air pollution.
- Water at the base, not on the leaves, of landscape plants.
- Design your landscape with plants that survive on natural rainfall.
- Use drip or micro-irrigation in flower beds to reduce runoff.

## Manage yard pests with Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

- Avoid the routine use of pesticides.
- Hand-pick pests or use non-pesticide tools such as attractant traps and floating row covers.

## Fertilize wisely

- Test your soil every three–five years.
- Use compost, slow release, or natural organic fertilizers.
- In autumn, mow lawns lightly covered with fallen leaves, rather than raking and disposing of leaves separately.

## Plant wisely

- Replace problem plants with non-invasive native plants.
- Incorporate a variety of native plants.
- If a lawn is necessary, plant drought-tolerant turfgrass species.
- Replace unneeded lawn areas with ground covers.

To have your property evaluated for Bay-Wise adaptation and/or certification, review certification requirements at the YouTube video mentioned above or at <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environment-natural-resources/program-areas/ume-bay-wise-program/links-resources-and-publications>

Why help clean up the Bay through “backyard” participation? By following the Yardstick practices listed above, we help to protect the health of fish, crabs, oysters, and other aquatic life in the Bay. For example, curtailing nitrogen and phosphorous pollution from human activities, particularly including sewage and septic systems; agricultural, urban and suburban runoff; and stormwater runoff—all help control or shrink the dead zones from pollutants that flow from our yards to the Chesapeake Bay.

In addition, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation reports that mercury in fish tissue can be more than a million times higher than in surrounding water. Air pollution, primarily from power plants, is the main source of the mercury contamination of fish in the Bay watershed, and, in turn, in those humans who eat the fish. At greatest risk are fetuses, infants, children, and women of childbearing age.

Below are several web sites that may help you determine whether your property is eligible to be Bay-Wise certified. <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environment-natural-resources/program-areas/master-gardener-program/about-program/bay-wise-program>



Actions you can take to become a Bay-Wise gardener; How your landscape or food garden measures up; Application for Bay-Wise landscape and garden certification:

<https://extension.umd.edu/baywise/program-certification>

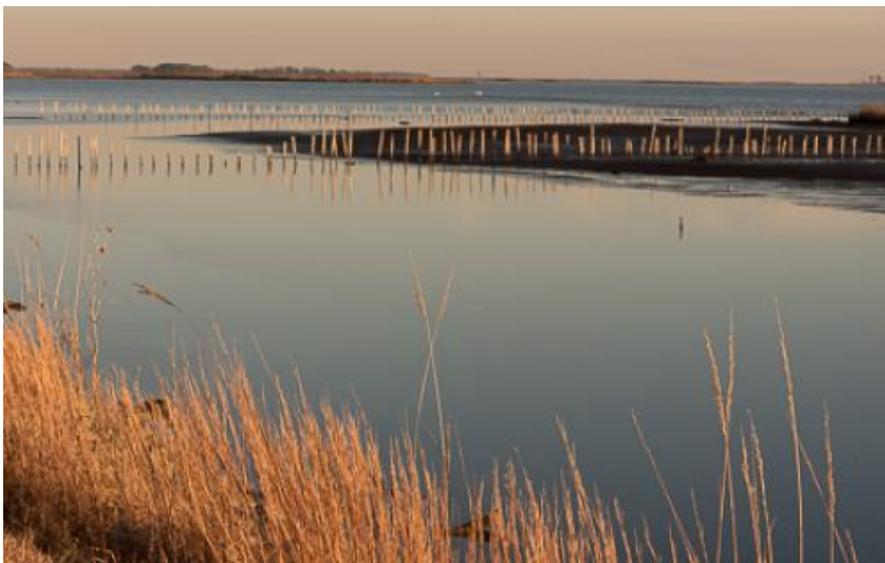
<https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environment-natural-resources/program-areas/ume-bay-wise-program/how-participate>

2020 Chesapeake Bay State of Health Report: <https://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/state-of-the-bay-report/index.html>

Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint: <https://www.cbf.org/how-we-save-the-bay/chesapeake-clean-water-blueprint/what-is-the-chesapeake-clean-water-blueprint.html>

Other information to help you become Bay-Wise: <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmental-resources/program-areas/ume-bay-wise-program/links-resources-and-publications>; and [Bay-Wise MD Landscape Certification - YouTube](#).

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Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Chesapeake Marshlands NWR, is home to many birds, waterfowl, and other wildlife. Portions of the NWR were once part of the farms where Harriet Tubman lived. (photo courtesy of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge)

In addition, visit our website for upcoming virtual seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, or other announcements at <https://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> , or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596)

*For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.*

*Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>*

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