

## RainScaping effort aims to take Anne Arundel by storm

By Lara Lutz, May 2009, The Bay Journal

Slow it down. Spread it out. Soak it in.

The chant is rising from Anne Arundel County, MD, this spring as the Chesapeake Ecology Center spearheads a countywide campaign to combat polluted stormwater runoff with Bay-friendly landscaping.

Thirty-four campaign partners are hammering the message home with print and television advertisements, news articles and a RainScaping website that was launched on April 22.

RainScaping includes a suite of landscaping options that collect and absorb stormwater before it can wash pollution into waterways and hasten erosion.

Zora Lathan, director of the Chesapeake Ecology Center, said the campaign aims to promote rain gardens, tree plantings, rain barrels and permeable pavers as "beautiful solutions to water pollution."

Lathan said the time is right for the much-needed message.

Anne Arundel County is surrounded by more than 500 miles of shoreline, but even its water-conscious residents fail to recognize the threat that polluted stormwater runoff poses to local water quality.

"Residential and commercial runoff is the greatest impact to our waterways," Lathan said. "People are unaware of that."

Despite a growing interest in RainScaping, most people aren't sure how to proceed. The center has a busy schedule of presentations to urban and suburban landowners seeking advice.

"Lots of people are inclined to do the right thing, but need encouragement and tools to take the next step—even environmentalists and gardeners," Lathan said.

The website offers a compilation of resources from the campaign partners and will become more interactive with time. Lathan plans to post how-to videos and use Google Earth to show the location of RainScapes in the county. The public can take the RainScaping pledge, then post photos and feedback from their own projects.

The center will sponsor workshops and help partners install "education stations" to draw attention at high traffic locations. Each station uses a timber-frame archway to suggest a house front, adorned with examples of RainScaping that include a miniature green roof, a rain barrel and permeable pavers.

The goal of the two-year campaign is to reach 10 percent of the county's 500,000 residents and help them take action.

The campaign is funded mostly by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Lathan said grants for social marketing campaigns are invaluable for environmental causes.

"The environmental community needs to do a much better job at selling its goods," Lathan said. "We don't give nearly enough focus or resources to good messaging."

*Lara Lutz is a writer and editor who lives on the South River in Mayo, MD.*