



St. Joseph
County
Soil & Water
Conservation
District



Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

July/August 2018
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2903 Gary Drive, Ste 1, Plymouth, IN 46563
Website: stjosephswcd.org

Telephone (574) 936-2024
e-mail: info@stjosephswcd.org

What's Going On...

*Events hosted by the St. Joseph County SWCD
& Our Partners in Conservation*

July

4th - Independence Day - office closed

17th - Monthly Board Meeting - Open to the Public 7 PM
LOCATION: Alligator Room Centre Township Library at Kern and Miami Roads in South Bend - 1150 Kern Road South Bend, IN 46614

August

3rd-19th - Indiana State Fair

21st - Monthly Board Meeting - Open to the Public 7 PM
LOCATION: Alligator Room Centre Township Library at Kern and Miami Roads in South Bend - 1150 Kern Road South Bend, IN 46614

September

3rd - Labor Day - Office Closed

18th - Monthly Board Meeting - Open to the Public 7 PM
LOCATION: Alligator Room Centre Township Library at Kern and Miami Roads in South Bend - 1150 Kern Road South Bend, IN 46614

Best Rain Barrel Workshop Ever!

Despite the rain, as part of South Bend's Best Week Ever, the St Joseph County SWCD held a rain barrel workshop. Through our sponsors we were able to offer this workshop free to our participants. We had an overwhelming interest in this workshop and registration was filled within the first 24 hours! We were able to build 28 rain barrels for residents around St Joseph County. Due to the rain, some participants chose to pick up their barrels and supplies and complete them at home after a little instruction.

Rain barrels help reduce rainwater runoff that would flow into the storm drains and could flow directly into the local rivers and streams. A typical house has a roof area of 1,200 square feet and four downspouts that will each drain about 300 square feet of roof. That means a rainfall of 0.3 inches will fill a 55-gallon rain barrel placed under each downspout. Rainwater can be used for any non-potable purpose such as watering plants, washing cars, or bathing pets.

Did you miss this workshop but you're interested in participating in a future rain barrel workshop? Contact our office staff to be added to our contact list at info@stjosephswcd.org, or call us 574-936-2024 ext. 4. For more information on installing, winterizing and painting your rain barrel visit our website, www.stjosephswcd.org/rain-barrels.



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Experts talk soil health

Written by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service

'Home-grown innovation' needed for wide-spread cover crop use, expert says

Before World War II, most farmers included forage legumes like alfalfa and red clover in crop rotations ahead of nitrogen-demanding crops like corn. Forage grasses and small grains were also commonly used to curb soil erosion.

But according to Joel Gruver, a cover crop expert at Western Illinois University, cover crops fell out of favor during the rise of mechanized agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s—and increased again in the 1970's due to growing public concern about the environment combined with spikes in input costs.

Today, farmers are recognizing that cover crops, used in combination with no-till and diverse crop rotations, can significantly improve the health of their soil—and with it, the productivity and profitability of their farms.

"Modern agriculture's cover crop pioneers have figured out how to make them work on their farms, with some impressive results," Gruver says. "It's going to take home-grown innovation by farmers who haven't used cover crops to really ramp up their use. I say that because everyone's situation is different; cover crops aren't an 'off the shelf' practice that can be done the same way on every farm."

While the basic principles of cover crops may stay the same, Gruver says the best genetics, establishment, and termination methods for individual farms can vary widely with respect to objectives, location, weather conditions, crop, soil types, and more.

"Fortunately, many of the farmers trying cover crops now are experienced no-tillers or strip-tillers who have a track record of doing the type of trouble shooting necessary to make cover crops work consistently," Gruver says.

Radishes offer advantages in cover crop mix, expert says

Farmers are increasingly discovering the benefits of cover crops. A fairly recent entry into cover crop mixes—radishes—demonstrate some of those benefits. Joel Gruver, a cover crop expert at Western Illinois University, says radishes are "a cover crop with much potential and

few residue management challenges." But, he cautions, they are not a "silver bullet."

For example, Gruver says opportunities for fitting radishes into corn and soybean cash grain systems are limited compared to cropping systems with crops that are harvested earlier like small grains, vegetables, or corn silage. He says, however, the advantages for using large-rooted daikon-type roots are extensive:

1. Robust roots can extend more than 3 feet deep in 60 days—after radishes winter-kill the channels created by the roots tend to remain open at the surface, improving infiltration, surface drainage and soil warming, as well as improving root growth on following crops.
2. The radish roots are a biological alternative to deep ripping to alleviate soil compaction.
3. A good stand of radishes can eliminate nearly all weed growth during, and for some time after, active radish growth.
4. Because radish residues deteriorate rapidly after winter kill, there are few residues to deal with at planting time.
5. Rapid, deep extension of radish roots makes them excellent scavengers of residual nitrogen following summer crops, both from the topsoil and deeper layers.
6. Because radish residues decompose and release nitrogen rapidly, the crop following may get an early boost in nitrogen uptake and growth, similar to following a legume cover crop.
7. Full canopy closure in as little as three weeks after planting offers rapid soil protection against erosion.
8. Lab tests show radish residues reduce the survival of root knot nematodes and soybean cyst nematodes.
9. On-farm comparisons in four states have shown significant increases in corn and soybean yields following radishes compared to fallow or other cover crops.

For more information on how to "Unlock the Secrets in Your Soil," call or visit your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Women's Learning Circle Workshop

St Joseph County NRCS, SWCD, along with Elkhart & Marshall County NRCS & SWCD will be hosting a **Women's Learning Circle Workshop** on August 14, 2018. Learning Circles are informal, peer-to-peer workshops for women farmland owners to learn about agricultural conservation practices and soil health.

Women fill many roles in agriculture. They are farmers and farm workers, farm owners and tenants, ranchers, agricultural researchers, educators and agri-business people. According to USDA's Economic Research Service, *Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms*, found that the number of women-operated farms more than doubled between 1982 and 2007. Nearly a third of the nation's land in farms are now farmed or co-farmed by women. Many have inherited family land, some are just starting out, some are returning to the farm, and many are "non-operating" landowners who lease their land to neighboring farmers.

An Iowa study found that women landowners and farmers have a strong connection to conservation and land stewardship. They are deeply committed to healthy farmland, farm families and rural communities. However, they may not be aware of existing resources that can help them.

Women's Learning Circle Workshops provide information in a comfortable, informal setting where women learn from professional conservationists as well as from each other. The meetings are facilitated in a way that builds knowledge and confidence. Participants are considered the "experts" on their own production, farmland and

conservation needs, and are encouraged to speak about their own experiences and goals rather than simply listening to a presentation.

Topics for the learning circles include soil health, grazing, wildlife and pollinator habitat, talking to your tenant and different forms of agricultural leases, and planning for the whole farm, including forestry practices, just to name a few.

**Please contact our office to register and for more details.
(574) 936-2024 Ext. 4 or info@stjosephswcd.org**



Environmental Education Programs

St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District is excited to provide our community with environmental education. Getting outside and doing hands on science is fun for children and adults alike. Teaching St. Joseph County residents about our natural resources and how important they are will hopefully inspire people to want to protect them. We bring our programs to schools, extracurricular groups, events and more. We are happy to lead or assist in classroom programs, lead field trips, participate in events, provide resources, and more.

Topics Include:

- **Watersheds** - Students will use our augmented reality sandbox and activities to learn about watersheds and how our actions can affect everything downstream!
- **The Dirt on Soil**- Students will learn about the properties of soil and the importance of soil conservation through investigation.
- **Composting 101**- Composting is a great way to eliminate waste and create fertilizer for your garden. We can even help you set up a worm composting bin in your classroom.
- **Pollinators**- Bees, butterflies, and birds, oh my! Through discussion and a game, we will learn the importance of pollinators.
- **Wild St. Joseph County**- There are many animals that share our county with us. Let's talk about the different types of wildlife you might see and how they are adapted to this environment. Animal artifacts will be there for students to see and feel!

- **Habitats**- Indiana is filled with many unique habitats such as wetlands, forests, prairies, and lakes. We will define what a habitat is and explore why each of these places are unique and important.
- **Invasive species**- Students will learn about the plants and animals that are not native to our county but are still present. These invaders are threatening our ecosystem and natural resources. Let's discuss why they don't belong and how to manage them.
- **Backyard Conservation**- What can you do in your backyard or schoolyard to help conserve our environment? Let's review the different options including rain gardens, wildlife habitat, and more.
- **Agricultural Best Management Practices**- Learn about the different things our farmers are doing to keep our watershed clean and protect soil health.
- **Stream Monitoring**- Let's explore the different things that make a stream healthy. Using our Hoosier Riverwatch kit, students will get to study a stream or river with habitat evaluations, macroinvertebrate counts, and chemical tests. Which tests we choose to do will depend on the age group and length of program.

Want us to come present on something that you do not see? Please contact our Environmental Education Coordinator, Jane Sablich, to develop or schedule something for your classroom, group, or event. These lessons can easily be adjusted to be appropriate for a variety of age levels.



Visit us on Facebook 2903 GARY DRIVE PLYMOUTH IN 46563

St. Joseph County Soil And Water Conservation Partnership

Have you seen the episodes of Outdoor Elements on WNIT this year featuring the St. Joseph County SWCD & NRCS? If you missed them, don't worry you can catch up on all their episodes on their website at:

www.wnit.org/outdoorelements



Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Supervisors:

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Dave Vandewalle

St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation Partnership Staff:

Sarah Longenecker, SWCD
Sandra Hoffarth, SWCD
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Debbie Knepp, NRCS

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Keith Lineback
William Millar



Scan me to go Green!

Are you ready to "GO GREEN" and help us save money and natural resources? We can deliver your "Conservation Kaleidoscope" newsletter by email ... Give us a call or send us an email and tell us you'd like to "GO GREEN" THANK YOU!!!!