As spring comes to Kane County and we count down to Earthday 2018, we shift our thoughts to outdoor activities. Many folks start planning their gardens and readying for a season of lawncare. Most people want to do the right thing and want to help our environment. But many times, they don’t know quite what to do. The question often is, how can I help in my own little sphere of influence?

So, I wanted to provide some tips on actions everyone can take to help with each changing season.

Tips to help our environment in the Spring:

1) Do not use phosphorus fertilizers on your lawn. Studies show that most suburban lawns do not need phosphorus. Commercial lawn care companies are required to not use phosphorus fertilizer in Illinois, but make sure if you do your own lawn treatments that you get slow-release fertilizer without added phosphorus. Phosphorus generally just runs off the lawn and into waterways and ponds where it helps fuel unhealthy algal blooms.

2) Consider planting native species that produce lots of nectar to support all our pollinators, including the monarch butterflies and bees. Did you know that most native species of bee are solitary, not social like the honeybee?

Summer Tips:

1) Mow and irrigate your lawn only as needed. Letting the grass grow longer between mowings actually helps the grass compete better with the weeds. If the grass hasn’t grown much because it has been dry – don’t mow – really you can skip a week!

Autumn Tips:

1) Don’t rake your leaves into the street or get them into the curb/gutter along the edge of the street. This clogs stormsewer inlets with leaves and can cause local flooding. It turns out, it also can cause a surge of phosphorus to be released into local waterways if the leaves are in the paved areas during rain events. Keep them in the lawn part of the parkway and follow the guidance of your village/city for leaf pickup – or better still compost them yourself. I till my leaves into my vegetable garden every year and have not put any leaves on my parkway in 30 years.

Winter Tips:

1) And while winter is fading away this year, we know it will be back. Consider how you use salt for deicing in the winter. Can you reduce the amount of salt used? Do you use a “safe” blend for lawns and pets? Can you use sand for traction – like we did back when? The issue with salt is this – the chloride part of salt (sodium chloride) stays in solution. We don’t have a best management practice to remove or filter out chlorides. Therefore, our region is seeing steadily increasing chloride concentrations in our waterways and even in our groundwater. And we do kind of need our clean freshwater.

Just a few thoughts on how you can be more sustainable with easy actions each season.