

We've Only Just Begun

Kelly Crout, District Director

So begins another year, one in which will most likely go by in a flash, just like years past. January is the time for us to start anew; while the District doesn't necessarily start with a blank slate, it is a chance to plan for new ideas and directions. This is a delicate balance of staying true to our mission while also trying new things. Our staff spends time creating our Annual Plan of Work, along with our goals and focuses for the year with the understanding that not everything always goes as planned.

For 2025, with the ever-pressing expansion of houses and businesses across our county, especially along the I-75 corridor, perhaps now is the time more so than ever to focus a little more intently on sustainable development and best management practices for homeowners. We get a lot of calls and questions in regards to erosion, drainage, and streams from homeowners and landowners looking for some form of guidance. Our stance at Butler SWCD is that education and information are key components for everyone to enjoy their property, while also allowing our natural resources to remain in the forefront.

Our team is excited to work on new educational materials, as well as new workshops for homeowners and those that live in Homeowner's Associations. We want to sincerely thank our Butler County Board of Commissioners for approving our operating budget this year and giving us an increase, so that we can offer more to you, our residents and taxpayers.

One final thought as we enter this new year - conservation doesn't follow fence lines or township boundaries. As such, we don't or won't focus on one sector alone. So, while we may have a more direct approach this year for suburbanized areas, we will continue to offer our services and promote conservation and natural resources in all areas throughout Butler County.

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Rain Barrel Workshop

When: Tuesday, March 11th, 2025
Where: 1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011
Time: 6-7 PM
Cost: \$55 with rain barrel, free without

Registration opens February 3rd
 Visit SaveLocalWaters.org to register

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Winter Tree Care

Dakotah Zimmer, Natural Resource Technician

Despite the chilly weather, there is still plenty to do outside, if you're brave enough. Like most life in the winter, trees and other deciduous plants become dormant and store energy for the following spring's new growth. While most established or mature plants don't require any winter preparation, some newly installed plantings may need extra help getting through our cold Ohio winters. Recently installed trees (planted within the past year or two) are more susceptible to winter damages from snow/ice, wind, uninsulated roots, and winter drought. Usually during the spring and summer, tree care consists of fertilizing, re-mulching, and supplemental watering.

During the winter, tree care should consist of inspecting for damage, pruning, and installing winter protection measures. This article will go over the basics in winter tree care to ensure your new and old tree plantings make it to next spring with vigor.

Pruning



Proper use of hand pruners on a young tree. Photo credit: Joseph Brian, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

One of the most important and beneficial maintenance practices you can do for your trees is prune them in the winter, or during the tree's dormant season. Pruning trees can improve overall structure and stability, remove decay or disease, promote new growth, and increase overall tree longevity. Disease carrying insects and pests are most active during the spring and summer, and least active during the winter. Tree pruning should occur during the winter months to minimize the risk of pest or disease introduction, especially for disease susceptible species such as ash (*Fraxinus spp.*), red oak (*Quercus spp.*), and elm (*Ulmus spp.*).

Evergreen species such as pine, spruce, and fir usually need minimal pruning, as most species are effective in dropping lower, dead branches when necessary. The main goals of pruning evergreen species are to improve air circulation through dense foliage, remove dead or decayed branches, or to improve summer growth. Pruning evergreen species when they don't necessarily need it can cause more harm than good, so it is always recommended to contact an ISA Certified Arborist® to inspect and assess

your trees before action is taken. Similarly, flowering trees and shrubs such as lilacs, magnolias, redbud, or azaleas **should not** be pruned during the winter, as this will remove the flower buds and delay spring flowering. Such species should be pruned **after** spring flowering to encourage even more blooms and longer pollination period.

Pruning procedures can look different depending on the tree's species, age, and health condition. In young trees, or newly installed trees, pruning can be accomplished with hand pruners, loppers, or a handsaw. Pruning mature trees should be done by a professional Certified Arborist, as they most often require advanced equipment and skills such as aerial lifts, chainsaws, and tree climbing. If you decide to take on pruning your own young trees this winter, be sure you have the correct tools and personal protective equipment, and knowledge of proper pruning techniques. For more information on proper pruning techniques, please call the Butler SWCD office.

Winter Damage



Damaged mature tree branches from snow/ice. Photo credit: Randy Cyr, Greentree, Bugwood.org.

Winter is one of the best seasons to conduct tree work, mostly due to a decrease in pest introduction, but also due to increased canopy visibility. Deciduous trees drop their foliage for the winter to reduce water loss through their leaves, reduce photosynthesis to accommodate for shorter daylight hours, and to save energy on nutrient transportation. Deciduous tree leaf drop is crucial to winter survival and makes inspection for damage or decay more visible. Ohio winters come with strong winds, snow, ice, and arid conditions, all of which can have adverse effects on young and mature trees alike. Heavy snow or ice events can weigh down tree branches which can cause even the healthiest of stems to break. Depending on the tree species and its health condition, some trees can withstand the additional weight of snow or ice without breakage. Although it may be tempting, it is never necessary (and often not recommended) to remove snow from tree branches, especially in mature trees, due to safety risks. By staying on top of winter tree inspections and pruning routines, winter damages to healthy trees could be minimized. If your tree is damaged from winter conditions, seek expert help from a Certified Arborist to assess the damage and create a management plan for your tree.

Although it may seem like our evergreen species were made for cold, harsh winters, some species are still susceptible to winter damages. Unlike deciduous trees that drop their leaves every fall to reduce water loss, evergreen species retain their needles for more than one year. This allows evergreens to produce photosynthesis year-round and allows some species to have multiple flushes of growth throughout the year. On the downside, year-round needle retention can be risky during dry, cold, and windy winter months.

Winter burn in evergreen species is a result of water loss in their needles from arid conditions, causing brown (or burnt-looking) foliage. Winter burn can affect all of the foliage or only certain areas, most often, the wind-side or sunny-side of an evergreen tree will experience the brunt of winter burn. Some evergreen species can recover from winter burn injury in the next growing season. If winter burn injury is severe and a significant amount of foliage is lost, the evergreen tree may not recover and further decline in health.



Winter burn injury on a young evergreen tree. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service - North Central Research Station, Bugwood.org

Winter Protection

Winter conditions can present stressful growing conditions for young trees that haven't been able to acclimate yet. However, there are measures the average homeowner can take to protect their newly planted trees this winter. For trees that have been planted within the last 2 years, winter is a great time to prune for damaged branches and to encourage healthy plant structure. Since tree canopies are more visible during this time, trees should also be inspected for decay, insect damage, sap oozing, bark cracking, and overwintering insect egg masses. If you need assistance in winter tree inspections or proper pruning techniques, call the Butler SWCD office.

Winter burn in young evergreen trees can be mitigated by wrapping the tree in burlap or a mesh bag for the winter season. Wrapping evergreens during the winter can reduce their exposure to harsh winds and create a microclimate within the wrap to keep things nice and toasty. Unfortunately, this method of winter protection does not extend past young evergreens, as mature trees are simply too large to effectively manage winter burn this way.



Winter burn protection on young evergreen tree. Photo credit: University of Minnesota Extension.

If you have tree seedlings or shrubs planted in outside containers, consider the effects winter might have on them too. Potted plants are more at risk of root damage from winter conditions than plants in the ground. Soil and snow layers help insulate underground tree roots, but in a container, the soil is hardly deep enough to have the same effect. To protect your container planting, consider storing them away in a cool, dark place for the winter (garage, shed, dry basement, greenhouse, etc.). If you don't have storage space, placing a wire mesh fence around the container and filling it to the top with dry mulch or straw will add a layer of insulation for roots to survive the winter. Another method of winterizing container plants is to plant the whole pot directly in the ground and cover with a thick layer of dry mulch or straw.

Even though native plants are well adapted to our finicky Ohio winter, it's good practice to help them along the way, especially when they are new additions to the landscape. Hopefully, this article gives you a basic understanding of how winter tree care is just as important as growing season care. If you have any questions on winter tree care, proper pruning techniques, or winter protection measures, reach out to our office to talk to our on-staff ISA Certified Arborist®.

Apply for 2025
SCHOLARSHIP

Butler SWCD is offering a non-renewable \$500 college scholarship to students enrolling in courses that focus on the conservation of natural resources.

Deadline: February 28th

Visit butlerswcd.org/grants

Navigating the Skies

Brady Smith, Rural Specialist

National headlines were made recently when the airspace at Wright Patterson Airforce Base was closed due to UAS (Unmanned Aerial Systems, also known as drones) activity. Air traffic controllers notified all nearby aircraft of the unidentified flying objects while security forces worked to clean the airspace. Frustration and confusion remains high, as more incidents have been reported across the country. Many questions remain, who is operating these drones, and for what purpose?



Social media amplifies the panic of drone activity, with many local social media groups and pages filled with conspiracy theories and threats to “take out” drones that fly above resident properties. It should be noted that people do not own the airspace above their property; shooting down a drone could ultimately result in you ending up in a federal prison and worst case scenario being listed as a domestic terrorist. Anxiety regarding drones is increasing, which could also lead to false reports and mass hysteria; many landing lights on planes could be mistaken for drones. If you believe a drone is maliciously operating over your property, you can report these incidents to the FAA.

But what about legal drone operations? The FAA is very clear about the requirements and expectations of drone operation. Before you go unboxing the new drone you got for Christmas, it’s important to understand the difference between recreational and commercial operations. Generally, recreational operations include flying a drone for fun, taking pictures of personal property, or filming your vacation. Recreational users are required to take a free online knowledge test. The main goal of this test is to educate users on proper flying.



This is an example of a commercial drone used for pesticide application on agricultural fields. Photo credit: Butler SWCD.

Drones become commercial when you are getting paid to fly, gain ad sales, are used for commercial real estate listings, or utilized for agricultural purposes - for this you will need a part 107 license. Drones used to apply pesticides, spread fertilizers, or seed crops are also

subject to additional requirements since they are carrying and dispensing a pay load; for this you will personally need a part 107 and a part 137 license as well as appropriate state pesticide licensing.

We often say it’s hard to find something you can’t do with a drone. The Ohio Department of Transportation uses drones to fly corridors along highways for surveying and inspections. Mining and construction industries use drones to estimate cubic yards of material. Drones have also been explored to identify tree species and for logging operations. As long as a drone is equipped with the proper lighting, night flights are completely normal and legal. Night operation of drones could include public safety, thermal imaging, or other types of surveying.

Any commercial or private flight can be viewed in real time simply by looking online www.flihtadar24.com; this is a good way to verify if what you are seeing above you is a drone or not. Any drone flown in the United States is required to have remote ID broadcasting for tracking purposes, although this isn’t public information, the FAA can track drone activity using Bluetooth and Wi-Fi signals. Some larger drones like ones used for applying pesticides or conducting survey missions will broadcast on the same channels as larger flights, but this isn’t always the case.

If you are curious about getting into the drone industry or just want to fly for fun, visit the FAA Drone Zone online; there is a lot of great information on there about recreational versus commercial operations, where you can fly, and much more.

Lastly, Purdue University has a drone education program that offers training courses and other helpful information available at <https://extension.purdue.edu/uav/>.



Mark Carter, Purdue Extension Educator - Agriculture & Natural Resources, Blackford County, teaching the UAV Technology Program at the Reily Community Center in October 2024. Photo credit: JT Benitez, OSU Extension, Butler County.

What are PFAS?

Ashlee Widener, Water Resource Specialist

You may have heard in the news the past year or two the term PFAS, but what does this term stand for, and what role does it play in our water supply? PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, otherwise known as “forever chemicals.” PFAS are manmade chemicals that were manufactured beginning in the 1940’s. These chemicals consist of carbon and fluorine atoms that are very strongly bonded to each other, making them difficult to breakdown in a natural environment, resulting in the term “forever chemicals.”

PFAS are found in many waterproof and nonstick products, including clothing, grease resistant paper, cosmetics, cleaning supplies, cookware, and in some fire extinguishing foams. Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) and Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) are the most commonly used chemicals in the PFAS group. PFOA, also known as C8, was used in the production of Teflon that was widely used in nonstick cookware starting in the mid 1900’s.

PFAS can enter the environment near locations where they are produced or manufactured, disposed of, or spilled. PFAS can seep through the soils and contaminate groundwater as well as surface water, like streams and rivers. PFAS can bioaccumulate in fish tissue overtime, making them dangerous to eat. Most people are exposed to PFAS through eating contaminated food, like fish, drinking contaminated waters, using products that contain PFAS, or working in occupations that manufacture or use these chemicals.

PFAS are highly prevalent in the environment and can cause adverse health effects depending on duration, frequency, and levels of PFAS exposure.

Health impacts can include but are not limited to; an increased risk to certain cancers, thyroid disease, low birth weight, pregnancy complications in women, and high cholesterol. The negative impacts of PFAS are still being studied, but fortunately, many companies and manufacturers are starting to phase out the use of these “forever chemicals,” and are searching for alternatives.

PFAS in Ohio

In 2023, the U.S. EPA released a PFAS Proposed National Primary Drinking Water Regulation. This rule legally established maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) for six PFAS in drinking water. In 2019, Ohio Governor DeWine, Ohio EPA, and Ohio Department of Health (ODH) developed an Ohio PFAS Action Plan designed to enhance the understanding of PFAS through sampling, investigations, and monitoring. This action plan is designed to test the presence of PFAS in Ohio’s drinking water.

Ohio EPA and ODH have also developed Statewide Action Levels for six different PFAS, including PFOA and PFOS. Ohio has also implemented an Ohio Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) Takeback program that works with fire departments, local governments, and government owned airports that want rid of their AFFF’s after Governor DeWine signed a law in 2022 prohibiting the use of AFFF’s containing PFAS. Ohio EPA has also provided millions of dollars towards drinking water projects that address contamination from chemicals like PFAS. While PFAS can be detrimental to human health and the environment, Ohio is taking action to help mitigate the impacts of PFAS.

If you would like to learn more, please visit the Ohio EPA’s website on PFAS.





Here is an example of a nonstick skillet labeled as “free of PFAS, PFOA, Lead & Cadmium.”

NATIONAL AG DAY BREAKFAST

Tuesday, March 18th

TOPICS	INFORMATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Managing resistant weeds with Liberty HerbicideSoybean Cyst NematodeSoybean Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none">5113 Huston Road, Collinsville, Ohio 45004Breakfast 8AMProgram 8:30AMRSVP by 3/7 at 513-785-6663



2025 Wildlife Garden Series

This year, Butler SWCD will hold the first two sessions of the Wildlife Garden Series indoors - then move outdoors for the summer and fall sessions. All sessions will begin at 6:00 PM.

Registration: Free, however, we ask that you register to assist us with providing resources. Visit www.butlerswcd.org or call (513) 887-3720 to register.

Session #1 - Creating An Urban Backyard Habitat

Date: **February 10**

Location: Fairfield Lane Library, 1485 Corydale Dr., Fairfield 45014

Topics: Turning your yard into a habitat while still maintaining a lawn & creating an amphibian habitat.

Session #2 - Native Plants For Happy HOAs

Date: **April 14**

Location: Fairfield Lane Library, 1485 Corydale Dr., Fairfield 45014

Topics: Low maintenance native plants & creating pollinator hotels.

Session #3 - Garden Tour

Date: **July 14**

Location: The Conservatory, Miami University Hamilton, 1601 University Blvd., Hamilton 45011

Topics: Tour the gardens around the Conservatory & learn about urban issues, such as road salt, that can be a hindrance to native plants.

Session #4 - Pawpaw Picnic

Date: **October (TBD)**

Location: Oxford Township (TBD)

Topics: What are pawpaw's, how to grow them, & what can you make with the fruit.

This free series is brought to you by Hamilton Conservation Corps, OSU Extension of Butler County, and Butler Soil & Water Conservation District. We hope you can join us.

2025 Native Tree & Shrub Sale

The past few years Butler SWCD has tried out new formats for our annual Native Tree & Shrub Sale. Some have gone really well and some not so much. So, for 2025 we're going to try another format, in-person sales only. **No pre-orders will be taken.** That means that the sale will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. We will have 10 species of trees and/or shrubs available to purchase.

In-Person Sale Dates:

Wednesday, March 26 - 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Friday, March 28

Saturday, March 29

9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Sale Location:

Butler SWCD Building

1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011

Forms of Payment Accepted:

All sales must be paid for with cash or check only.

No credit card payments will be accepted.

Sales Tax:

Update - There will be no sales tax collected during this year's sale. Since the sale is being held no more than 6 days the District is not required to collect sales tax!

Other Important Information:

This year, our bareroot seedlings are from Forrest Keeling Nursery, located in Missouri. By switching to a nursery within the same hardiness zone as Southwest Ohio, we hope to increase seedling survivability rate and vigor. Although not guaranteed, the plants are inspected by the nursery to be disease free before shipment. Butler SWCD is not responsible for their survival after they have been picked up by the customer. If a species is not able to be supplied by the nursery due to disease we will replace with another species. All packs will contain 5 seedlings of the same species.

The species listed will be available to purchase at our Native Tree and Shrub Sale in March 2025:

- **Shade trees** (80ft +)
 - * Persimmon
 - * Shagbark hickory
 - * Willow oak
- **Smaller trees** (< 40ft)
 - * Pawpaw
 - * Serviceberry
 - * Redbud
 - * Flowering dogwood
- **Shrubs** (< 20ft)
 - * Elderberry
 - * Witch-hazel
 - * Buttonbush

Prices will range from \$15 - \$20 per pack of 5 seedlings.

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Interested in volunteering?
 Butler SWCD hosts **BEST Volunteer Events** throughout the year at locations all across the county.
 Visit www.butlerswcd.org/volunteer for more information and to sign-up.

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Do you have questions about stream erosion and potential solutions?
 Check out our newly updated streams website at www.butlerswcd.org/urban-stream. Also keep an eye out for the Butler County Stream Maintenance Guide and a potential homeowner's workshop to discuss common stream concerns.

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Upcoming Events

- **Garden Series, Session #1:** February 10
- **Office Closed, President’s Day:** February 17
- **Board Meeting:** February 18
- **BEST Volunteer, Harvest Live Stakes:** February 27
- **Butler SWCD Scholarship Deadline:** February 28
- **Board Meeting:** March 11
- **Rain Barrel Workshop:** March 11
- **Ag Day Breakfast:** March 18
- **BEST Volunteer, Invasive Removal:** March 22
- **In-Person Tree Sale:** March 26 - 29
- **Garden Series, Session #2:** April 14

To find out more information on any upcoming events, please visit www.butlerswcd.org or call our office at (513) 887-3720.

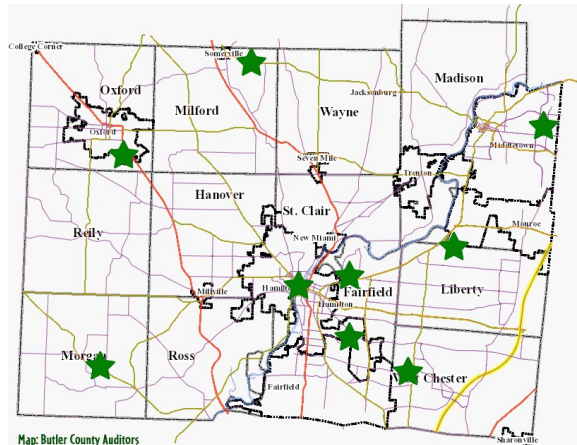
Save the dates



2025 BEST Volunteer Program

This year, the Butler Environmental Stewardship Team (BEST) will be teaming up with a few new partners, including the Fairfield Chapter of the Izaak Walton League and the Morgan Township Parks Committee.

BEST has a variety of projects that you can become involved in. We work with all ages and can provide paperwork for students that need to document their volunteer hours. For a complete list of this year’s BEST projects, visit www.butlerswcd.org/volunteer.



Map: Butler County Auditors