River Star Homes: 
Your Guide to Creating a River Friendly Home

YOU make all the difference.
Thank you for agreeing to 7 steps you can take at home to restore the health of the Elizabeth River. Here’s how to get started.
Who We Are

The Elizabeth River Project is the nonprofit leading community efforts to restore the environmental health of this great harbor river while affirming her value to our port economy. For too long, the Elizabeth River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay, has been infamous for pollution. Instead of lamenting the problem, we prefer to take hope from her strengths. From Great Bridge Lock to the naval base, you can see the importance of the Elizabeth River every day in Hampton Roads. She gives us our work and our play.

Our Mission

To restore the Elizabeth River to the highest practical level of environmental quality through government, business and community partnerships.

How You Can Help

River Star Homes are a special group dedicated to making our river healthy again for people and wildlife. It’s easy and the rewards are so great. Join many Hampton Roads residents to make small changes that add up to a big difference.

River Star Homes Is Supported By:

- City of Norfolk
- City of Chesapeake
- City of Virginia Beach
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
River Star Homes Help Restore Our River
IT’S FREE, FUN & IT REALLY HELPS!

Thank you for making a difference! You’re one of more than nearly 5000 River Star Homes taking easy, fun steps to help your river at home. Here’s your “how to” guide for seven simple steps that add up to BIG progress.

1. “SCOOPE THE DOG POOP”
2. REDUCE LAWN FERTILIZERS
3. ONLY RAIN IN THE STORM DRAIN
4. NO GREASE IN YOUR SINK
5. HELP GEESE MIGRATE -- DON’T FEED THEM
6. AVOID SINGLE-USE PLASTICS
7. DON’T FLUSH MEDICINES

Visit www.RiverStarHomes.org or call the River Star Homes Program Manager at 399-7487 for more information.
1. Scoop the Poop

The Elizabeth River Project’s goal is to reduce harmful bacteria in the Elizabeth River - with your help.

Poop from your pooch may not seem like a big problem — but with over 23,000 dogs on the Lafayette branch of the Elizabeth alone, all that poop adds up! When it rains, the poop washes into the river. Pet waste is a major cause of the high bacteria levels that make the Elizabeth unsafe for swimming after a rain.

But thank goodness for River Star Homes! You’ve used more than 32,000 bags since Elizabeth River Project and Doody Calls installed Scoop the Poop stations in 2011.

What you can do

- Pick up after your dog in your yard and on walks. Use a small trowel or a plastic bag to “scoop the poop.”
- Make sure your pet does not poop directly on the pavement. Choose a grassy area where you can easily pick up your dog’s poo.
- Place the bag in your trash can.
- On walks, look for our Scoop the Poop stations with the River Star Homes logo.
- Prefer someone else to scoop? Consider a service such as Doody calls, www.doodycalls.com, a River Star Homes supporter.
2. Reduce Lawn Fertilizers

River Star Homes can help you achieve a beautiful lawn without chemicals. That means you’ll reduce the excess nutrients that lead to massive algal blooms — and potential fish kills — each summer in the Elizabeth and its Lafayette branch. River Star Homes report their “best lawn ever” after their free lawn visits.

- Replace grass with native plant gardens.
- Choose grasses that grow well in our area such as warm season Zoysia, St. Augustine and Bermuda.
- Mow high (at least 3 inches) and keep your blades sharp. Mowing too low, or with dull blades, makes grass susceptible to weeds, pests and diseases.

What you can do

- Sign up at RiverStarHomes.org for a FREE visit from our lawn advisors if you live in eligible areas.
- Test your soil — you may not need supplements. We suggest a “low-impact soil test” for $10 from Waypoint Analytical, www.waypointanalytical.com.
- The most effective step you can take for a healthy, natural lawn: Rent an aerator form your hardware store to bring air to the soil. Then top dress your lawn with organic compost. You will need 1 cubic yard per 1,000 square feet – rake it in about 1/4” thick (compost available from Four Seasons Nursery 757-420-4182).
- Overseed thin areas in the spring and fall to crowd out weeds.

Visit www.RiverStarHomes.org or call the River Star Homes Program Manager at 399-7487 for more information.
3. Only Rain in the Storm Drain

You play a daily role in the Number 1 source of pollution to the Elizabeth River. That’s because every outdoor surface you use — your yard, the roads, your driveway, and the street you park on — probably drains straight into the Elizabeth when it rains.

Urban storm drains typically send the river a “toxic soup” of oils and grease from the roads and excess nutrients from your yard — not just fertilizers, but leaves, grass clippings and dog poop. Never fear— River Star Homes are here!

What you can do

- Install a rain barrel to collect rain before it becomes pollution. You’ll lower your water bills, too. Visit RiverStarHomes.org to learn more about rain barrels. You may qualify for a subsidy!
- Keep leaves, grass clippings, litter, motor oil — everything other than water — out of your storm drains.
- Move your car on street-sweeping day so the city can keep storm drains clean.
- Use mulch or open-design pavers instead of solid paving, so rain can soak into the ground.
- Wash your car at a car wash (they capture the runoff) instead of in your driveway.

Visit www.RiverStarHomes.org to learn about our current rain barrel offers!
4. No Grease in Your Sink

When you pour cooking oil, grease or fat in the kitchen sink, you may be causing river pollution without knowing it! Fats, oils and grease cool and harden, causing sewer pipes to clog and overflow. As a result, raw sewage can wash into the river when it rains. Hampton Roads Sanitation District and area cities are doing their part by replacing many miles of aging pipelines. Please help at home, too.

As much as 50 percent of sewer overflows come from people putting cooking grease down the sink (or toilet). Keep sewage from reaching the river—put fats in the trash, not down the drain.

What you can do

- Allow kitchen fats to cool in a container such as an empty jar, then throw the container in the trash. (Never rely on hot water to melt the grease—it just hardens later.)
- Make sure your downspouts and sump pumps are not connected to the sewer system.

Report sewer overflows:
- Chesapeake 382-2489 • Norfolk 823-1000
- Portsmouth 393-8691 • Virginia Beach 385-1470
- Department of Environmental Quality at 518-2000 or 1-800-468-8892.
5. Help Geese Migrate
Don’t Feed Them

Canada geese populations have increased dramatically here and across the U.S. Their poop contains harmful bacteria.

What you can do

- Don’t feed the geese so they’ll migrate.
- Geese prefer open lawns with easy water access. Plant beautiful native trees and shrubs along your shoreline. We have funding to help with your shoreline planting if you live in certain areas of the Elizabeth River watershed.
- Dogs are effective at chasing off geese.

Beautify Your Shoreline & Discourage Geese!

Certain areas of the Elizabeth River watershed are eligible for up to $4,000 to plant your waterfront with river-friendly plants! Call to see if you qualify 399-7487

River Star Homes helped Bart and Kate Morris create a beautiful shoreline buffer.
6. Avoid Single-Use Plastics

The weight of plastics in the oceans could equal that of fish by 2050 if current litter trends continue, estimates the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

Do your part – when practical, avoid single-use plastics or those that are used one time before being thrown away or recycled, such as plastic straws, bags and water bottles. Re-usable alternatives are readily available for bottles and bags and are becoming more available for straws (but think twice – do you really need that straw or bag?)

River life is endangered when sun, wind, waves and heat break plastics into pieces that look like food to marine life. Fish, shellfish, plankton, turtles and birds can choke or starve after ingesting these plastics. Free-floating chemicals can adhere to these surfaces and pose further risks.

What you can do

- Use alternatives such as stainless steel or paper straws, reusable water bottles, and reusable shopping bags
- Please do not litter – Help keep your home River clean!
- Support local businesses that have committed to eco-friendly alternatives.

What you can do
7. Don’t Flush Medicines

Sewage treatment facilities are not designed to remove medicines from your sewage. If drugs are flushed down the toilet, they may end up in our water when the sewage treatment facility discharges to the river. Exposure to drugs in waterways can negatively impact aquatic life.

Make your flush count! Keep medicines out of the river.

What you can do

• Drug take-back programs at drugstores are the ideal way to dispose of unwanted medications. Many cities also host special events for collecting medicines.

• HRSD recommends three steps for properly disposing of medicine:
  • Mark out all identifying personal information on the prescription label.
  • Crush solid medications or dissolve them in water and mix with kitty litter, sawdust, or another substance that will make the drug unsuitable for human or animal consumption. This advice applies to liquid medications, too.
  • Seal the container and place in the trash for landfill disposal.
Go Beyond the First 7 Steps…
Keep Up the Momentum for a Healthy River

As a River Star Home, we hope you’ll be inspired to go beyond these first 7 steps. You can expand your river stewardship with opportunities such as:

• Generous members just like you make all of our restorations possible! Become a dues-paying member of the Elizabeth River Project at www.elizabethriver.org/donations.

• Participate in one of our special offers: Rain barrels, Rain gardens, Lawn makeovers, Living shorelines and Buffer plantings! Check our website, www.RiverStarHomes.org or call the River Star Homes Program Manager at 399-7487, to see if you’re eligible!

• Participate in special volunteer opportunities with other River Star Homes.

• Recruit your friends and neighbors to the River Star Homes program.

“Once I became a River Star Home, I wanted to have a greater impact. Elizabeth River Project provided the assistance I needed to carry out multiple projects. I began donating to keep the momentum growing!”

– Lynn Gilbert, River Star Home, River Star Business and member of Elizabeth River Project.

Visit www.RiverStarHomes.org or call the River Star Homes Program Manager at 399-7487 for more information.
Thank you for your starring role!

 Invite your friends and neighbors to help restore the Elizabeth River, too. River Star Homes is free for anyone in the watershed. Signing up online is simple and quick at www.RiverStarHomes.org or call or write us at

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