

Recycling "Yard Wastes" On-Site¹

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INTRODUCTION

Little if any of the so-called "yard trash" should be removed from the landscape where it is produced. Fallen leaves, grass clippings, shrubbery trimmings and tree limbs are all valuable plant material which can be used in a variety of ways to enhance your home or community's landscape. The purpose of this document is to present some on-site uses for these natural organic materials. Your ingenuity can undoubtedly add to the list. **Please consider on-site recycling as an alternative to your present means of yard trash disposal.**

Municipalities and their citizens realize tremendous savings of time and energy when plant materials are used on-site rather than concentrated in landfills or other disposal sites. The cost of collecting, hauling

and handling yard trash is a large share of the solid waste management expense. Costs average around 20 percent annually, but jump to as much as 50 percent when grass clippings and leaf rakings are collected as waste.

The disposal cost of municipal solid waste is even higher when yard wastes are buried, unnecessarily, in landfills along with garbage and hazardous wastes. Florida's Solid Waste Management Act, enacted in 1988, mandates that yard waste be handled separately after 1991.

Check through the following tables and select ideas which you can utilize to convert your current "yard wastes" into an asset. You and your landscape plants will reap the benefits--and all of society will be spared the cost of disposal.

YARD WASTE RECYCLING OPTIONS

Table 1. Fallen Leaves and Pine Needles

Option 1. Shred with lawn mower.

Advantages and disadvantages: Breaks up leaves for faster decomposition; no raking or gathering needed; nutrients and organic matter return directly to soil.

Equipment required: lawn mower.

Option 2. Rake or collect with bagging lawn mower, and use as mulch for tree and shrub beds.

Advantages and disadvantages: Leaf mulch reduces water evaporation and protects soil from erosion and crusting; provides weed control; prevents soil from splashing on buildings and sidewalks; reduces need for purchased mulch; recycles nutrients as leaves decompose.

Equipment required: lawn rake or bagging mower, cart.

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1. This document was published as Soil and Water Science Fact Sheet SL-61, November 1992. For more information, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office.
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Option 3. Collect and compost in a compost pile.

Advantages and disadvantages: Compost can be used for soil enrichment. Composting requires work, attention to details, and a place in the landscape where the pile can be located.

Equipment required: leaf-gathering tools, compost bin, turning fork.

Table 2. Grass Clippings**Option 1. Do not collect when mowing.**

Advantages and disadvantages: No effort needed; material decomposes and nutrients are recycled in place; no disadvantages when proper mowing, fertilization and irrigation practices are followed; most efficient option.

Equipment required: None.

Option 2. Collect with bagging lawn mower and use as mulch.

Advantages and disadvantages: Organic matter and nutrients are kept on the premises. Disadvantages: the practice removes nutrients and organic matter from the lawn; requires effort to empty bagger; mulch may produce odor if piled too thickly.

Equipment required: bagging lawn mower, cart.

Option 3. Collect with bagging lawn mower and add to compost pile.

Advantages and disadvantages: Same as if used as mulch; same as for making compost with leaves.

Equipment required: bagging mower, cart, compost bin, turning fork

Table 3. Shrub Prunings, Remains of Garden Plants and Weeds**Option 1. Break or cut into small pieces (e.g. 6 to 12 inches) and spread as mulch on shrub and tree beds.**

Advantages and disadvantages: Nutrients and organic matter are kept on the premises. Disadvantages: generally needs to be reduced to fairly small pieces to be acceptable in landscaping; requires more work than simple hauling to curb.

Equipment required: No extra tools required.

Option 2. Shred with lawn mower, chipper or shredder and use as mulch on beds or paths.

Advantages and disadvantages: Materials lose appearance of "trash" and look like mulch; succulent materials decompose rapidly while woody materials decompose more slowly; Note: safety precautions needed when shredding woody materials.

Equipment required: Shredder, chipper or lawn mower, cart.

Table 4. Tree Limbs and Woody Shrub Prunings**Option 1. Saw into firewood lengths.**

Disadvantages: Firewood not needed in many parts of Florida; leafy material and smaller branches must be handled separately.

Equipment required: saw, shears, cart.

Option 2. Chip or shred and use as decorative mulch or for path-making.

Advantages and disadvantages: Reduces need for purchased mulch; saves cypress trees and pine bark for other uses. Equipment is relatively expensive.

Equipment required: chipper or shredder, cart.