



Yard Waste & Water Quality

How can something as natural as yard waste impact our water quality? In nature, a balance forms between growth and decay and when a natural system (such as a stream habitat) becomes out of balance the system becomes dysfunctional. When a stream habitat has to process more decaying vegetation than it naturally generates, the system becomes unhealthy.

*Leaves, grass clippings, twigs and other yard waste are naturally composed of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. Dumping these excess nutrients into a nearby stream (storm drain, ditch or lake) disrupts the stream's ability to keep itself healthy which impacts the water quality and aquatic life. It causes things like algae to grow much larger than they should which depletes the oxygen in the water for the fish and other stream life, making it difficult for them to survive. **But the good news is you can reuse it as free fertilizer for your yard and gardens!***

Save Money by COMPOSTING & Help Keep Our Water Clean!



1. Compost yard waste in a home-made or purchased compost bin creating reusable, free fertile soil.
2. Use a mulching mower. This reapplies the clippings (and nutrients) back onto the yard which helps feed the lawn, retain moisture and protects from the hot sun. Mow in different directions each week to prevent thatch build up.
3. Keep your grass at least **3** inches long to reduce the amount of clippings. Taller plants grow longer roots which keeps the grass & soil healthier and more drought resistant.
4. Blow your leaves on top of your gardens in fall. They protect perennial roots from cold temps and add free nutrients to your garden as they decay.
5. Mulch walkways between the rows in your garden with yard waste to help prevent weeds and save on buying wood mulch.
6. And remember, storm drains are for clean rain water *only*.

Resources

- gardenseason.com
- compostguide.com
- University of Minnesota Ext. - tinyurl.com/jagyt8o
- OSU Extension — tinyurl.com/z94vxcd
- howtocompost.org