



Why are we sharing this information?

We base our outreach calendar articles on the needs of each community's reporting requirements. The monthly articles, photos or social media topics can be used for stormwater (MS4) or end-of-year reporting. If you choose to post one of these topics, make sure to note the date and information shared to your community! If Franklin Soil and Water helps out in your reporting, we will need this information to include in each report.

September Outreach Article

Fall Lawncare Leaf Mulching & Management



Ahhh, Fall. The season of vibrant colors, rich aromas, comfort food, and layered clothing. While we participate in many pleasant activities during its bright, crisp days, autumn also brings a less pleasant chore- dealing with leaves. Whether you pile, compost or bag them, there are some best practices to keep in mind to protect water quality and your local infrastructure.

Leave the Leaves

Grass clippings and leaves return nutrients and organic matter to your lawn and soil, and prevent soil compaction caused by rain and foot traffic. Shred fall leaves with your mulching blade or make multiple passes until they're about the size of a dime (grass blades will still be visible) so they'll break down quickly by spring. Too many? Use excess leaf material in garden beds or add it to your compost bin for a good carbon ("brown") source. Dead leaves also provide cover for wildlife during the colder months. According to the National Wildlife Federation, "Removing leaves also eliminates vital wildlife habitat. Critters ranging from turtles and toads to birds, mammals and invertebrates rely on leaf litter for food, shelter and nesting material. Many moth and butterfly caterpillars overwinter in fallen leaves before emerging in spring."

Leaf Collection

If your township has curbside leaf collection, rake leaves to the grassy area between the street and the sidewalk or to the edge of your lawn, if there are no sidewalks. Do not rake or blow leaves into the street. "Leaf piles will not kill grass, although they may cause it to temporarily discolor. The grass will grow back, rich and green, in the spring. To prevent grass from discoloring, rake your leaves immediately before your scheduled pickup date." (from the City of Dublin Guidelines for Safe and Efficient Leaf Collection). If your township has curbside yard waste recycling, remember to put the leaves in trash cans marked "yard waste" or in the large paper bags sold for this purpose at grocery, hardware and home stores. Leaves will not be collected if they are in plastic bags.

Don't Dump

If you live along a ravine or stream, do not dump your leaves "over the edge." The leaf piles will form thick mats that won't decompose over the winter. The vegetation under the leaf piles will then die, leading to erosion on the streambank or ravine. Erosion leads to water quality problems and loss of property as the bank slides, slumps or becomes undercut by high water. The other water quality problem with leaves being introduced into streams, either through the stormwater system from street drains or through dumping over streambanks, is the depletion of oxygen that can kill fish and other stream organisms. When organic matter decomposes in streams, bacteria use up the dissolved oxygen that is needed for aquatic organisms to live. This process is what causes the "dead zones" in the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Erie.

Topsoil

In an ideal world, lawns would be established on 6"-12" of good topsoil, but it takes about 100 years to create just one inch? Meaning you probably aren't fortunate enough to have this valuable resource right under your feet as only a couple of inches of topsoil are applied to start a lawn in newer housing developments.

The next best step to reclaiming your yard back is to blend organic leaf matter and compost with the topsoil. Compost includes decaying plant materials and composted manures that enrich and loosen the soil, improve clay-heavy soils, hold nutrients, and slow erosion. While not an overnight transformation, in a few years, even hard packed clay will improve to an impressive mix of healthy soil several inches deep. Moreover, plants and trees will love the constant addition of organic matter and nutrients.

Article Recap

Shredded leaves can benefit soil health as they break down to provide organic matter, while whole leaf debris provides important habitat for overwintering animals. Use care to prevent clogging stormdrains that prevent flooding, and avoid dumping yard waste along streambanks. Your city or township may collect leaves that are raked to curbside, or those placed in paper bags or designated "yard waste" cans.

Good topsoil is the foundation for a healthy lawn, but many new homes have had their topsoil compacted and removed during construction, leaving behind debris and clay. These lawns soak up little water and require more fertilizer and pesticides. To slowly improve topsoil so your grass grows better, add organic materials like lawn clippings and mulched leaves.

Social Media Text & Photos

- Skip the rake this fall season and let leaves stay where they fall. They won't hurt your lawn if you chop them with a mulching mower. Overtime, leaves will break down into rich, organic compost that will improve the

quality of any soil.



Leaf it on your lawn!

Putting mulched leaves and clippings on your lawn builds better soil, blocks weeds and keeps yard waste out of landfills.

GET GRASSY!
Clean water by the yard.

getgrassy.org • A Franklin Soil and Water Project

Lonnie the lawn gnome

- Landscapes with little or no topsoil can make it difficult to produce a garden, lawn, or other plants. Topsoil, dark in color compared to the underlying soil, is the part of a soil that is most biologically active, nutrient rich, and easily managed. It also supplies most of the plant's water and nutrients. For more tips, visit getgrassy.org and take the pledge!

In Franklin County landfills...



**13% Wasted Food
6% Yard Waste**

**20% of our
current landfill
could be composted!**

- Did you know that SWACO (Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio) estimates that almost 6% of our Franklin County landfill is Yard and Pet Waste? Along with food waste, almost 20% could be composted instead!



Leaf the Collection to Professionals

- Avoid raking & blowing leaves into street, or burning yard waste
- Check your local ordinance regarding leaf collection
- Mown, shredded leaves (dime-sized pieces) break down quickly for improved turf and soil

Piled leaves for streetside pickup won't kill grass, but it may yellow if left too long. Rake into piles just prior to your collection date.



Video

Gardener's Gold



Links to Share

- [SWACO- Yard Waste Fact Sheet](#)

Upcoming Outreach Calendar

October- Plant Native Plants, Benefits of Native Plants and Trees

November- Home Contractor Outreach, Importance of Construction BMP's

December- Winter Tips, Salt and Stormdrains

If you need any additional information, photos, or graphics, please contact me and I will send you the original files.

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