



## Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

Creating Conservation Solutions for Over 70 Years

### Why are we sharing this information?

*We base our outreach calendar articles on 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 end-of-year report.*

Click to view or print our full [2020 Monthly Outreach Schedule](#)

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## September Outreach Article

# Fall Lawn Care Leaf & Mower Management

With more residents spending time at home, fall is a great time of year to take simple actions to protect our water. If you live in an area with lots of mature trees, make a commitment to remove street leaves before the rain. It's an easy, yet very effective action that those living in the urban environment can take to reduce the amount of nutrients that wash into our waters each fall. When it rains, stormwater flows through leaf piles in streets creating a nutrient-rich "leaf tea" that travels through storm sewers making its way to our rivers and streams and can cause our waters to become green, murky and unhealthy.

### ***But Aren't Leaves Natural?***

When leaves fall in the autumn, they quickly decompose, and rain washes the natural fertilizers out of them. When this happens in a forest or on your lawn, they are recycled into the soil and trapped there helping plants grow in the spring. But when leaves, grass clippings or other organic materials are dumped near streams or creeks, natural fertilizers go right into our water, feeding algae and bacteria while depriving fish of oxygen. This affects everyone who pays for infrastructure that keeps drinking water safe, and streets free of flooding.

### ***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."

### ***Don't Dump***

For residents who live along a ravine or stream, do not dump 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.

### ***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. 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.

### ***Mower Management***

- Just because it's fall doesn't mean mowing season is over. Grass is still growing, just a bit slower.
- Reduce your mower height 1"-2" the last mow of the season.
- Mow over large leaves directly in your yard. Shredded leaf pieces improve soil!
- At the end of the mowing season, make sure to scrape the mower deck. Tip the mower onto its side and scrape loose any caked-on grass clippings from the underside of the deck. (Grass clippings contain moisture that can cause rust.)
- Sharpen the blades! Be 100% ready for when spring rolls around. Dull blades can harm grass.

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## **Article Recap**

Fall is a great time of year to take simple actions to protect our water. Clogged stormdrains can cause flooding and the stormwater that flows through leaf piles in streets create a nutrient-rich “leaf tea” that makes its way to our rivers and streams and cause our waters to become green, murky and unhealthy.

Shredded leaves can benefit soil health as they break down to provide organic matter, while whole leaf debris provides important habitat for overwintering animals.

Your city or township may collect leaves that are raked to curbside, or those placed in paper bags or designated “yard waste” cans.

Make a commitment to remove yard and street leaves before heavy rain comes in and washes them into a stormdrain!

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## **Social Media**

- When it rains, stormwater flows through leaf piles in streets creating a nutrient-rich “leaf tea” that travels through storm sewers making its way to our rivers and streams and can cause our waters to become green, murky and unhealthy. Keep our water resources clean by removing leaves and other debris from stormdrains.
- Leaves make great "brown" carbon additions to your compost pile. Use your mower

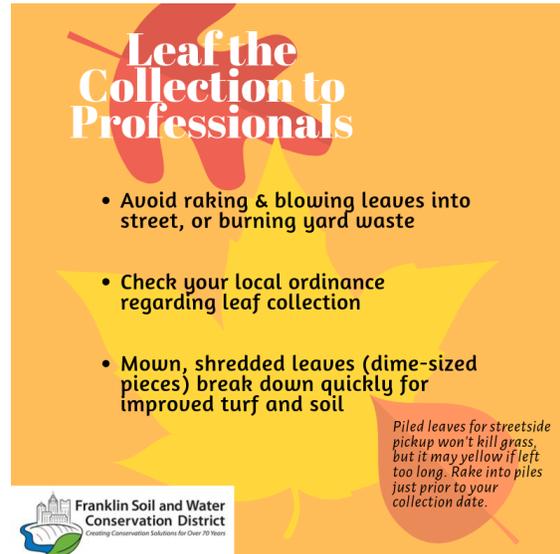
to mulch the leaves, emptying it into your compost bin for a year-round activity.

- 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. Check out the Get Grassy Fall Lawn Care video below for additional leaf resources!

## Video



## Photos



**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*

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## Upcoming Outreach Calendar

October- Stormwater Awareness (& Stormwater Week!)

November- Winter Backyard Conservation (Prepping your Yard & Plants for Winter)

December- Winter is Coming (Snow & Salt)

Click to view or print our full [2020 Monthly Outreach Schedule](#)

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

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