**Leave Grass Clippings on Your Lawn**

Grass clippings decompose quickly to add valuable nutrients that your grass needs to grow. Annual clippings left on the lawn are equal to one nitrogen application and can reduce the amount of fertilizer you need to add. Mowing at a slightly higher height, 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches, screens out light to the soil surface, thus preventing weeds (such as light-loving crabgrass seeds) from germinating. Try to mow often and not cut off more than one-third of the grass blade, so clippings will filter into the grass and quickly decompose. Grass clippings are an excellent source of nitrogen, either added to your lawn as it grows or to your compost pile to help microorganisms decompose other brown waste such as leaves. (Low Input Lawn Care, U of M Extension, 2000)

**Compost Yard and Organic Waste**

Yard trimmings and food residuals together constitute a significant portion of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream. Compost results from the decomposition of trimmings from your yard and vegetable food waste from your kitchen. Organic waste is broken down by a complex feeding pattern involving bacteria, fungi, worms, and insects. The composting process, when ideal, can heat the organic material to temperatures that kill weed seeds and disease-causing organisms. This organic matter is an excellent soil amendment, adding some nutrients, but more importantly improving soil structure, aeration and water-holding capacity. Compost also feeds beneficial micro-organisms in the soil and is an excellent mulch. (Small Scale or Backyard Composting, Cornell, 2006)

**Bring Yard Waste to a Community Site**

If you don’t have the space or the time to maintain your own compost, find a municipal yard waste site near you. Metro area compost drop-off sites are free to residents of the county that operates the site. Leaves, grass clippings and sometimes brush will be accepted, depending on the location. Some city compost programs also have curbside pick-up in the fall. Completed compost may be available free of charge from these sites. For information on the nearest composting site, contact your local county extension educator, county solid waste officer, or city recycling coordinator. (Composting and Mulching, 2008. U of M Extension)

**Do You Know?**

**Q: What is the ideal carbon to nitrogen ratio (C/N) should be to start the composting process in your compost bin?**

**A: 25-30 TO 1** Dry autumn leaves are about 50C:1N; kitchen scraps are about 12C:1N; grass clippings are about 20C:1N. In combining these materials, the overall ideal to strive for is 25-30C:1N. If you use 1 part leaves 50:1; 1 part kitchen scraps 12:1; and 1 part grass clippings 20:1; this will yield 50/1 + 12/1 + 20/1 for a total of 82/3 or 27/1, which is in the ideal range. If you use more leaves, or brown material, then the composting process will still happen, but it will take longer.

Compost may be created in a simple pile or using one of a variety of bins (from wooden structures to plastic). Moisture and air circulation and occasional turning with a garden fork are required for most efficient decomposition. Compost will generally be ready for use within one to two years with a lower C/N ratio of about 15/1. (Composting & Mulching, 2008. U of M Extension)

**Disposing of Leaves**

Options for off-site disposal include:
- hauled away for a fee by your private refuse hauler
- hauled away by a community pick-up program (if available)
- disposal at a community composting or drop-off site (if available)
- disposal at a commercial yard waste processing site

Options for using leaves at home include:
- spreading them as a mulch around trees, shrubs, and in planting beds
- adding them to your compost pile
- leaving some of them where they fall

Leaves make an excellent mulch for use around trees and shrubs, or in flower and vegetable gardens. They can prevent weeds, retain soil moisture, maintain lower soil temperatures in the summer, and protect against temperature fluctuations and low temperature injury during winter. They eventually decompose, adding their nutrients to the soil and improving soil structure. Leaves make a good addition to your compost pile. Shredding is not required, but it may speed their rate of decomposition. (Mugaas and Halback, 2008. U of M Extension)

For more information see: www.extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo/

References:

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