

Lake Erie: DON'T WASTE IT!

Proper disposal of Yard Waste

Grass clippings. Leaves. Sticks. Wood chips. These and other yard waste may not sound like they would be harmful to creeks or the animals that live in them. Homeowners and landscapers may even think that dumping these natural, organic materials on streambanks helps to slow erosion. But in reality, they can cause major problems, especially when they are dumped in smaller backyard streams and roadside ditches.



As these materials decompose, they consume oxygen, depleting the oxygen supply for fish, frogs and salamanders. Additionally, streams with low levels of oxygen often have a foul odor. Wood chips and pine needles can increase the acidity of the water. As these materials pile up on the streambank, they smother and kill vital streamside vegetation, making streambanks more susceptible to erosion.

And while logs and branches in the stream can provide beneficial habitat and channel stability, smaller sticks, leaves and grass clippings often float downstream and clog culverts or bridges, leading to localized flooding or new erosion. For this same reason, yard waste should never be dumped or blown into a storm drain or roadside ditch.

So, how should you dispose of yard waste?

REDUCE the amount of yard waste you generate: Consider using a mulching mower so that grass clippings are chopped up small, making bagging or otherwise disposing of them unnecessary. This has the added benefit of adding organic material back into your lawn soil. Leaves can often be mulched and incorporated into your lawn using this technique as well.



COMPOST: Grass clippings, weeds, leaves and many other yard and garden wastes can be composted right in your own back yard, along with plant-based kitchen scraps. Techniques range from a simple backyard compost pile to bins or even digesters that can also handle pet wastes. Finished compost can then be used to add fertility to lawn, garden and landscaped areas. Visit cuyahogarecycles.org for more information about backyard composting.

CONTACT your community. Most communities accept yard waste for composting either at a service yard or in association with curbside garbage collection. If your community does not offer this service, contact an Ohio EPA-certified compost facility.