Composting & Management of Grass Clippings and Yard Waste

Leaving grass clippings on the lawn rather than bagging for disposal is an excellent way to dramatically reduce yard waste. The amount of grass clippings generated from a given lawn varies, depending on the grass species, weather, fertilization and yard size ***(Managing Yard Wastes: Clippings and Compost: By B. Rosie Lerner, 2002)***.

Grass clippings left on the lawn are not harmful to the turf if it is mowed at the proper height and frequency. In fact, the clippings will return some nutrients back to the soil, reducing fertilizer requirements. Grass clippings do not contribute to thatch buildup because they break down rapidly. Thatch is composed of dead, decomposing roots and underground stems ***(Managing Yard Wastes: Clippings and Compost: By B. Rosie Lerner, 2002)***.

What are the benefits of leaving clippings in the lawn?

*(Scotts, **What To Do With Grass Clippings webpage**)*

They provide free lawn food. The most important thing you can do for your lawn is to feed it regularly, and grass clippings contain the same beneficial nutrients (like nitrogen and potassium) as lawn food, though in smaller amounts. Overall, grass clippings can provide a portion of the annual nutrient requirement for your lawn.

Less work for you. In addition to recycling nutrients back into the soil, leaving the clippings will cut down on your mowing time by relieving you of the chore of emptying the grass catcher and hauling bags of clippings out to the curb. It may also help keeping your clippings out of the landfill, depending on how your town handles yard waste.

When recycling grass clippings by leaving them on your lawn, there are few things to keep in mind.

*(Scotts, **What To Do With Grass Clippings webpage**)*

- Keep your mower blade sharp.
- Avoid mowing when the grass is wet.
- Mow regularly at the recommended cutting height for your type of grass. If the grass gets too long and mowing at your normal cutting height will remove more than 1/3 the length of the grass blades, raise the height on your mower. Mow once at the raised cutting height, then again in a different direction at the normal height.

When should you pick up clippings?

*(**University of Minnesota Extension**: Sam Bauer and Julie Weisenhorn, Extension educators;*
Bob Mugass, retired Extension educator; Brad Pedersen, horticulture professor emeritus)

While leaving clippings on the lawn is recommended, there are some exceptions to the rule where bagging or raking/sweeping may be required:

- Remove clippings if the lawn is heavily infested with diseases such as ***leaf spot, rust*** or ***dollar spot*** to help reduce disease severity.
- If the lawn is wet or the grass has become too tall, clippings can mat together and smother the grass.
- If your mower is unsafe to operate without a bagging attachment, the bag must be left in place.
- If clippings land in a curb and gutter area, remove them so they don't get into storm drains or carried to nearby water resources where they can negatively impact water quality.

Leaving leaves

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION BLOG WEBSITE | DAVID MIZEJEWSKI

You shouldn't feel obligated to rake up every last leaf in your yard this fall. Leave leaves on the ground – they have a lot of benefit to wildlife and your garden. Below are some tips on how to minimize the time you spend raking and maximize the benefit to wildlife and the greater environment that fallen leaves offer.

A leaf layer several inches deep is a natural thing in any area where trees naturally grow. The leaf layer is its own mini-ecosystem! Many wildlife species live in the leaf layer as their primary habitat – including salamanders, chipmunks, wood frogs, box turtles, toads, shrews, earthworms, millipedes and many insect's species.

Many butterfly and moth species overwinter in leaf litter such as Luna moths, great spangled fritillaries, woolly bear caterpillars (which become Isabella tiger moths) and red-banded hairstreaks. Some overwinter as eggs, some as pupae and some as adults. If you rake up and throw away all of your leaves this fall, you'll be getting rid of these beautiful and beneficial insects, many of which are pollinators. Butterfly and moth caterpillars are also a critically important food source for birds in the spring when they are feeding their babies. If you remove all of your fallen leaves, there will be fewer of these insects in and around your yard and fewer birds too.
Some bats overwinter in the leaf litter and can't survive severe cold temperatures without it.

When to Rake

The Spruce website* | *Written by David Beaulieu

Blessed with enough sunlight, nutrients, and water, and enjoying temperatures that are neither too cold nor too hot, cool-season grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, revitalize themselves in fall. "Cool-season" lawn grasses are called as such because they are most active during those periods of the year when the weather is moderately cool, such as in the fall. This is when they must "make hay," strengthening their root systems. A thick layer of fallen leaves can get in the way of the growth of these grasses. The leaves can deprive the grass of sunlight if not raked up in time.

If you don't have cool-season grass in your yard, you still may want to rake them. If it looks like the lawn is being smothered or if you think your mower won't be able to handle mulching the leaves, then you can rake the leaves to thin them out.

When the focus is on lawn health, you do not have to rake up every last fallen leaf. The homeowners whom you see hunting down stray leaves as if they were fugitives from justice are motivated by looks; they are striving for the look of a perfectly manicured lawn. If you do not care about that and want to keep your grass healthy, then rest assured that a few leftover leaves can't hurt your lawn. In fact, if you plan on mowing at least one more time that autumn, the mower blade will shred up any remaining leaves.

Composting Basics

*(OEPA, **Composting at Home webpage**)*

All composting requires three basic ingredients:

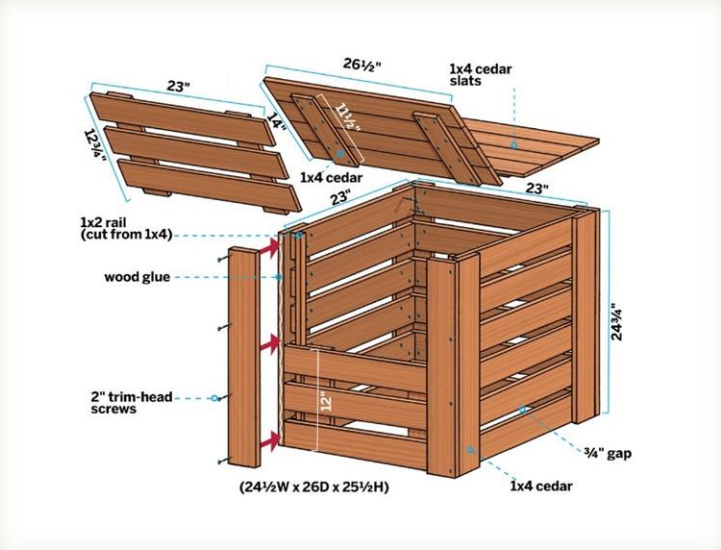
Browns - This includes materials such as dead leaves, branches, and twigs.

Greens - This includes materials such as grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit scraps, and coffee grounds.

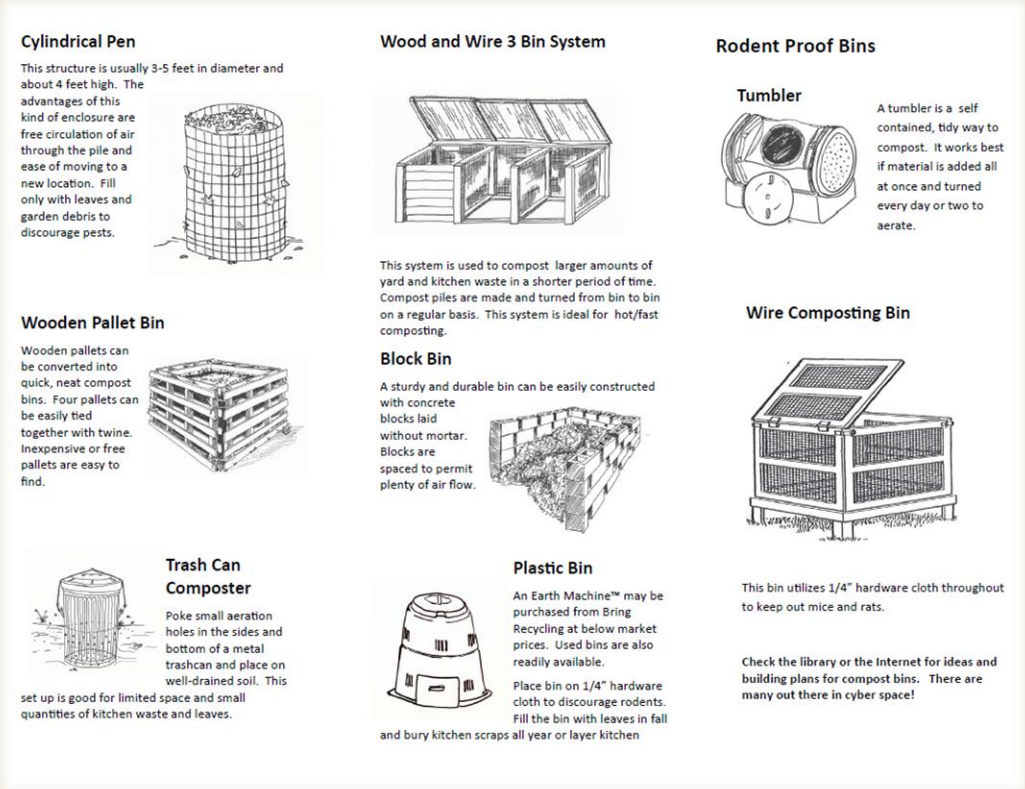
Water - Having the right amount of water, greens, and browns is important for compost development.

Your compost pile should have an equal amount of browns to greens. You should also alternate layers of organic materials of different-sized particles. The brown materials provide carbon for your compost, the green materials provide nitrogen, and the water provides moisture to help break down the organic matter.

Compost can be formed in open piles, but probably is more easily managed in a type of structure. Many types of containing materials can be found at home or at a hardware store (ex., wooden pallets, metal mesh wire and cinder blocks) ***(Managing Yard Wastes: Clippings and Compost: By B. Rosie Lerner, 2002).*** Traditionally compost bins are tucked away in a spare corner of the garden. Your compost bin should be easily accessible, but not in a place where occasional smells or leaching liquids will cause a nuisance. Place it on level, well-drained ground and make sure the location gets some sunlight. If the compost gets too cold this will slow down the composting process ***(HelpMeCompost.com).***



Article written by Jennifer Stimpson, This Old House
Illustration by Greg Nemec



Information by Oregon State University Extension

Benefits of Composting

*(OEPA, **Composting at Home webpage**)*

- Enriches soil, helping retain moisture and suppress plant diseases and pests.
- Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Encourages the production of beneficial bacteria and fungi that break down organic matter to create humus, a rich nutrient-filled material.
- Reduces methane emissions from landfills and lowers your carbon footprint.

In Your Area!

Compost Drop-off

While the recycling of paper and yard trimmings has grown rapidly in Ohio in the last 30 years, now up to 50 percent for paper and 62 percent for green materials, the recovery rate for food residuals is at less than three percent of nearly 96 million tons generated annually.

Paradise Lawn Care is your local food/yard waste compost center. There is no charge for local residents to drop off their food waste. Please review the lists on the right to learn what items are acceptable for food waste disposal. For information about food/yard waste disposal, please call: 330-669-3141.

*Starting August 1, 2017, there will be a drop off fee for all yard waste.

In Your Area Cont'd

Compost (food and yard waste) drop off locations:

***Main Location:**

6203 Akron Road

Smithville, Ohio 44677

Phone: 330-669-3141

Compost Drop-off:

4300 Mechanicsburg Road

Wooster, Ohio 44691

Phone: 330-669-3141

Paradise Composting Co. is a subsidiary of Paradise Lawn Care Inc.
Open Monday – Friday, 8am-5pm / Closed Saturdays

***Yard waste drop-off is offered at this location, restricted to lawn/weed clippings, garden debris, tree limbs and brush only.**

Sources:

Ohio Environmental Protection Agency: Composting at Home

The Scotts Company LLC: What to Do with Grass Clippings

University of Minnesota Extension: What to Do with Lawn Clippings

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service: Managing Yard Waste and Clippings (PDF)

National Wildlife Federation: What to Do with Fallen Leaves

The Spruce: Is It Necessary to Rake Leaves off the Lawn?

Oregon State University Extension: Choosing a Composting System (PDF)

This Old House: How to Build a Compost Bin Written by Jennifer Stimpson (Illustration by Greg Nemec)

Paradise Composting Co. (a subsidiary) of Paradise Lawn Care Inc.: Compost Drop-off

Allowed Material

- Fruits & Vegetables
- Meat, Fish, Bones
- Bread, Pasta, Baked Goods
- Egg Shells & Dairy Products
- Coffee Grounds
- Coffee Filters, Tea Bags
- Paper Towels, Napkins
- Paper Plates – NOT Foam
- Paper Cups – NOT Foam
- Milk & Juice Cartons
- Pizza Boxes, Cereal Boxes
- Cardboard Egg Cartons Only – NOT Foam
- Waxed Cardboard

Material NOT Allowed

- Blade walnut tree leaves or twigs – Releases substances that might be harmful to plants
- Coal or Charcoal Ash – Might contain substances harmful to plants
- Fats, grease, lard or oils – create odor problems and attract pests

Wayne Soil & Water Conservation District

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