




Hillsborough
County

Solid Waste Management Dept.
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HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
Board of County Commissioners

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Yard Waste



Garden Treasure



Hillsborough
County

Don't Bag It!

Disposing of yard wastes is a headache for the homeowner and a serious problem for Hillsborough County. Plant clippings and horticultural or landscaping debris makes up 20 percent or more of our community's solid waste. Not only is yard waste an expensive burden to our community, it's a waste of valuable resource. Yes, yard waste is a resource!

Use It!

There are four ways that yard waste can be reused, recycled or reduced.



4. Reduce Lawn and Landscape Clippings



The easiest way to deal with yard wastes is to simply reduce the amount you must handle and dispose. Plant selection, design and maintenance all play a role. Here are some suggestions.

1. Choose slowly to moderately growing shrubs.
2. Choose shrubs which have a mature height suited to their place in the landscape. Space them so they don't quickly become overcrowded and demand pruning.
3. Plant grass only where it serves a purpose for pets, play areas, recreation or access. Lawns require the most intensive inputs of water, fertilizer, pesticides and labor, and they generate the greatest amount of debris.
4. Create "self-mulching" areas of yard under trees. When leaves are shed, they can remain where they fall.
5. Too much water and fertilizer forces excessive growth of lawns and landscape plants – growth which must be mowed or pruned. Moderate amounts of water and fertilizer maintain the quality of the landscape and reduce expense, work and potential problems.

Visit the compost and mulch demonstration site at the Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension office. Call or write for more information on any of the topics presented here –

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Hillsborough County Solid Waste Management Department

Building a Compost Pile

1. Combine roughly equal amounts of “green” materials and “brown” materials in alternating three to four inch layers to a height of at least three feet. See Compost Materials chart. The smaller the particle size of the materials, the faster they will compost.
2. Add manure, a handful of fertilizer or blood meal to each “brown” layer to add more nitrogen.
3. Water each layer as you build the pile. The material should be moist, but not soggy.
4. Studies have shown that there is no advantage in purchasing a compost “starter.” Organic yard wastes such as grass clippings and leaves contain enough micro-organisms to start the decomposition process. Adding a layer of finished compost or soil will add more.

Managing a Compost Pile

1. A new pile will heat up rapidly and then, in four to seven days, begin to cool. It should be turned at this time. Rapid composting can be achieved in a few weeks by frequently turning the pile as it shrinks and cools. Water, if it appears dry.
2. An unturned pile will still compost, but will take three to four times longer.
3. Cover the pile to hold moisture and to protect it from leaching rains.
4. Compost is ready to use as a mulch or soil amendment when it is dark brown and crumbly. The texture does not have to be uniform. Use it as mulch, soil builder, an additive to potting soil, topdressing, etc.

Troubleshooting

Problem:	Cause:	Solution:
Odor	Excess nitrogen Excess moisture Lack of oxygen	Mix in “brown” materials Add sawdust, turn pile Turn pile
Pile too cool <i>(below 110° F.)</i>	Lack of nitrogen Lack of oxygen Lack of moisture Excess moisture	Mix in “green” materials or nitrogen fertilizer Turn pile Dampen pile Add sawdust, turn pile
Animal or Insect Pests	Food in pile (meat, fat, eggs)	Keep animal products out of pile

1. Turn Mess to Mulch

The best source of mulch is your own yard. Oak leaves, pine needles, grass clippings and shredded prunings can be used as mulch and your landscape will provide them free year after year.



Many types of mulch are available, but the best choice, from an environmental standpoint, is renewable mulch (ex: leaves and pine needles), by-product mulch (ex: pine bark, sawdust, pecan hulls) and recycled mulch (yard waste, construction debris, or pest plants which are commercially shredded and composted).

For best results, place a three to four inch layer of mulch directly on the soil over and beyond the root systems of plants. Leave a one to two inch space between the mulch and the plant’s stem or trunk. Roots will quickly grow into the mulch, so it’s important that it be replaced as it degrades.

Dry leaves can be reduced to a fine-textured mulch with a small shredder or by running across them with a rotary lawn mower. Woody branches from trees and shrubs require a heavy-duty shredder or chipper.

Mulching plants provides many benefits to a garden, the landscape and our environment:

Conserves water by reducing the evaporation and run-off of water from soil.

Controls weeds naturally – reducing work and chemicals.

Releases nutrients as it degrades, improves sandy soils and supports beneficial soil organisms.

Helps protect plants from weed eaters and mowers.

Prevents disease by acting as a barrier between plants and diseases harbored in the soil (fruit or vegetable rots, black spot of roses).

Enhances plant growth by increasing root growth and reducing competition from grass and weeds.

Insulates soil temperatures and keeps them cool during the day.

Beautifies the landscape by defining plant beds.

2. Grass Clippings Love'em & Leave'em

Bagging and throwing away grass clippings is a lot of work and a waste of free fertilizer. People usually pick up lawn clippings because they fear the lawn will "thatch" (build up a spongy layer of organic matter). This is not the case. Thatch is a product of overlapping growth and is aggravated by too much water and fertilizer. Clippings are 90 percent water and break down quickly when left on the lawn. As they degrade they release nutrients to the grass.

Grass clippings will not clump or be unsightly if the following maintenance practices are followed:

When mowing, remove no more than one-third of the grass blade per cutting.

Clippings should be no longer than one inch. For example, bahia grass should be cut when it is about four inches tall to a height of about three inches. The chart above shows suggested mowing heights for certain grass types.

Mow when the lawn is dry. Don't over-fertilize or over-water.

Lawns will suffice on two fertilizations a year and two waterings a week, less in winter. Overdoing these practices lead to insect, disease and cultural problems, not to mention excessive growth. Shop for fertilizers which contain slow or controlled release nitrogen. They provide a slow, steady feed to plants.

If you're in the market for a new mower, consider purchasing a "mulching" mower which cuts clippings into tiny pieces that decompose rapidly. Or, retrofit your existing mower with a mulching attachment. Rear bagging mowers can also be fitted with side shoots or mulching attachments so that clippings can be left on the lawn. If you prefer to pick them up, use them as mulch or a compost ingredient.



Grass Types	Mowing Height
Bahia	3"-4"
St Augustine	
Bitter Blue	3"-4"
Floritam	3"-4"
Raleigh	3"-4"
Floralawn	3"-4"
Floratine	2"-3"
Seville	2"-2.5"
Jade	1.5"-2"
Delmar	1.5"-2"
Bermuda	.5"-1.5"
Zoysia	1"-2"
Centipede	1.5"-2"

Note: The higher a lawn is cut, the deeper and more extensive the root system will be. A better root system increases the lawn's hardiness against drought and pests. A higher cut also shades and discourages weeds. **Keep mower blades sharp.** A ragged cut makes the lawn more prone to disease.

3. Develop a Sense of Humus -Compost-

Garden and landscape by-products can be converted into garden gold which improves sandy soil and the health of your landscape. You can actively or passively compost depending on the amount of time, money and energy you wish to devote to it.

Compost units can be purchased or constructed and are used to hold, and in some cases, turn the organic material. The minimum size of any compost unit should be a 3'x3'x3'. There are two basic types of units:

Holding units are simple containers or open piles suited for small volumes of debris added as it's collected. This type of unit requires little turning and composting is slow, taking 6-24 months.

Turning units are suited for large volumes of debris and are usually two or more barrels or bins. Debris is carefully mixed or layered and frequently rotated or turned. Composting is rapid, taking only a few weeks.



Additional equipment you may need are a thermometer which reads to 160° F or higher, a pitch-fork or shovel, a compost turning tool and possibly a shredder or chipper.

Green Materials –

Grass clippings, animal manures, tender foliage (young weeds, vegetable leaves, kitchen scraps).

Brown Materials –

Leaves from trees and shrubs, twigs or chipped branches, hay, sawdust, newspaper and cardboard.

A compost pile is a teaming mass of tiny plants and animals working together to break down organic matter. The key to rapid or "hot" composting is to provide the ideal environment for these micro-organisms: food, moisture and oxygen (air). "Food" is usually designated as "green" (high nitrogen materials) or "brown" (high carbon materials).