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Converting Yard Wastes Into Landscape Assets ¹

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Little if any of the so-called "yard trash" should be taken from the landscape where it is produced. Fallen leaves, grass clippings, shrubbery trimmings, and tree limbs are all valuable plant material which can be used in a variety of ways to enhance your home or community's landscape. The purpose of this publication is to present some on-site uses for these natural organic materials. Your ingenuity can undoubtedly add to the list. Please consider on-site recycling as an alternative to your present means of yard trash disposal.

Municipalities realize significant savings of time and energy when plant materials are used on-site rather than concentrated in landfills or other disposal sites. The cost of collecting, hauling, and handling yard trash is a large share of the solid waste management expense. Yard wastes currently represent about 15% of the total municipal solid waste collected in Florida. Since 1992, Florida's Solid Waste Management Act has prohibited placing yard wastes in lined landfills. Twenty-three states now have restrictions on landfilling of yard materials.

Check through Table 1 and pick out the ideas which you can utilize to convert your current "yard waste" into an asset. You and your landscape plants

will reap the benefits -- and all of society will be spared the cost of disposal.

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Table 1. Yard Waste Recycling Options.

Material	Action and Practice	Advantages and Disadvantages	Equipment Needed
Fallen leaves and pine needles	Shred with lawn mower.	Breaks up leaves for faster decomposition; no raking or gathering needed; nutrients and organic matter returned directly to the soil.	Lawn mower
	Rake or collect with bagging lawn mower and use as mulch for tree and shrub beds.	Leaf mulch reduces water evaporation and protects the soil from erosion and crusting; provides weed control; prevents soil from splashing on buildings and side-walks; reduces need for purchased mulch; recycles nutrients as the leaves decompose.	Lawn rake or bagging lawn mower, cart
	Collect leaves and compost in a compost pile.	Compost can be used for soil enrichment. Disadvantages: composting requires work, attention to details, and a place in the landscape where the pile can be located.	Leaf-gathering tools, compost bin, turning fork
Grass clippings	Do not collect when mowing.	No effort needed; material decomposes and nutrients are recycled in place; no disadvantages when proper mowing, fertilization and irrigation practices are followed; most efficient option.	None
	Collect with bagging lawn mower and use as mulch.	Organic matter and nutrients are kept on the premises. Disadvantages: the practice removes nutrients and organic matter from the lawn; requires effort to empty the bagger; mulch may produce odor if piled too thickly.	Bagging lawn mower, cart
	Collect with bagging lawn mower and add to compost pile.	Same as if used as mulch; same as for making compost with leaves.	Bagging lawn mower, cart, compost bin, turning fork
Shrub prunings, remains of garden plants and weeds	Break or cut into small pieces (e.g., 6-12 inches) and spread as mulch on shrub and tree beds.	Nutrients and organic matter are kept on premises. Disadvantages: generally needs to be reduced to fairly small pieces to be acceptable in landscaping; requires more work than simply hauling to curb.	No extra tools required.
	Shred with lawn mower, chipper, or shredder and use as mulch on beds or paths.	Materials lose appearance of "trash" and look like mulch; succulent materials decompose rapidly while more woody materials decompose more slowly. Note: safety precautions needed when shredding woody materials. Dulls lawn mower blades.	Shredder, chipper, or lawn mower, cart
Tree limbs and woody shrub prunings	Saw into firewood lengths.	Disadvantages: firewood not needed in many parts of Florida; leafy material and smaller branches must be handled separately.	Saw, shears, cart
	Chip or shred and use as decorative mulch or for path making.	Reduces need for purchased mulch; saves cypress trees and pine bark for other uses.	Chipper or shredder, cart