

Build a compost pile

- Composting can be as simple as a mixed pile of leaves and grass clippings or as high-tech as a solar powered rotating composter. Both do the job.
- Rake clippings from tall grass to use in your compost pile. They provide an excellent nitrogen source, especially if you are without access to manure. If grass is green, however, do not add too thick a layer of clippings at once, or it will not decompose properly.
- Other lawn wastes - leaves (both dry and fresh), straw, sawdust, woodchips - provide carbon and nitrogen for compost.
- Diseased or insect-infested plant parts and weeds should only be composted if you are certain your compost pile will heat up enough to kill the pest organisms and weed seeds.

Give away yard waste

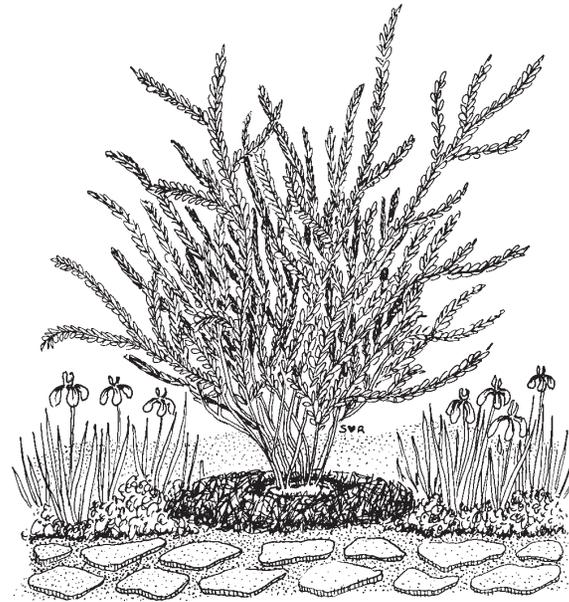
Find a neighbor who composts and would appreciate your yard wastes. Community gardens are also often grateful for the organic material.

Participate in municipal composting

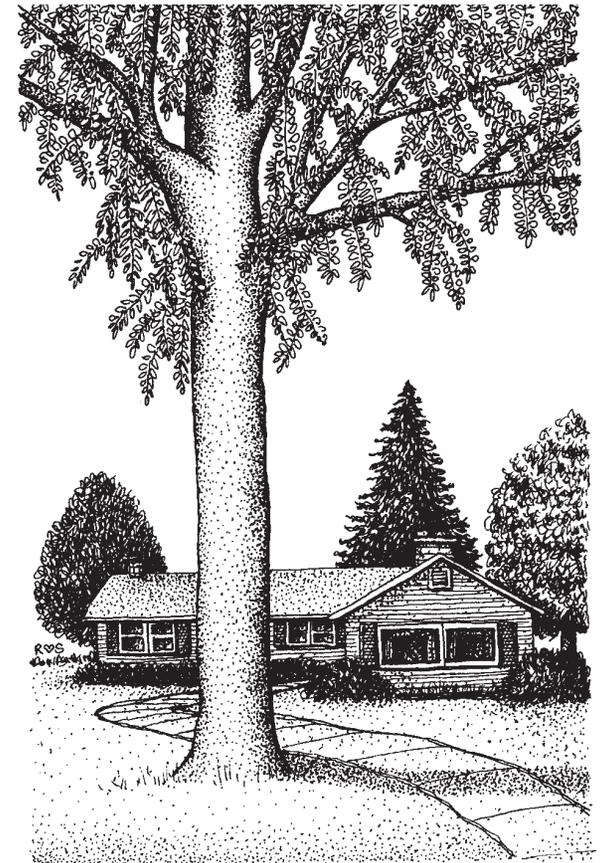
Remember your tax dollars pay the cost of collecting yard waste and composting; it's cheaper to keep material on your own property.



For more information on selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality, contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension Office. If you want to learn more about horticulture through training and volunteer work, ask your Extension agent about becoming an Extension Master Gardener.



Landscaping for Less in the Landfill



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Landscaping for Less in the Landfill

Virginia is rapidly running out of landfill space. Fifteen to twenty percent of solid waste sent to landfills is comprised of leaves, grass clippings, and other yard wastes. Gardeners can plan their landscapes to produce less yard waste and use what is produced around their homes to enhance yards, gardens, and soil. Following are steps gardeners can take towards landscaping for less in the landfill. They are all effective ways of reducing the amount of solid waste in our landfills, thereby also reducing the amount, of tax dollars spent for the landfills.

Select appropriate plants

- Avoid planting trees that sprout everywhere (Norway maple), or trees that produce a lot of yard litter (catalpa).
- Install the correct size plant for the available space, taking into consideration the size of the plant after it has matured. Less pruning will be required.
- Plant fine-leaved trees and shrubs (serviceberry, dogwood, ash, locust, sourwood, Japanese zelkova); they produce a minimum of yard waste which breaks down more quickly than debris from larger-leaved trees.

Create easy maintenance designs

Use permanent ground covers (periwinkle, pachysandra, hosta, English ivy, sedum, bugleweed) instead of lawns or plants that require pruning; this will reduce mowing and yard waste accumulation, as well as water consumption.

Create more decks, paths, or patios to reduce mowing, but not too many as they can create runoff and possibly erosion.

Understory plantings (shorter plants, such as azaleas and dogwoods, planted beneath oaks or other larger trees, for example) create a more natural look, as well as provide an area where leaves can be allowed to accumulate, rather than being raked or mowed.



Leave materials where they fall

- Leaves can often be left on the ground, provided they are not deep enough to smother grass or ground covers underneath. A light layer of leaves can be shredded by a fall mowing and left on the lawn to decompose and return nutrients to the soil during the winter.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn as mulch to recycle nitrogen. Mow more frequently so clippings are small and decompose rapidly.

Move materials to best landscape use

- Pine needles make an attractive, exceptionally long lasting mulch. Many organic mulches, including pine needles and leaves, are especially useful around acid-loving plants because they may help maintain soil acidity as they decompose.
- Brush piles can be located to provide habitat for wildlife. Camouflage piles by planting attractive vines, such as autumn clematis, to grow over them.
- Grass clippings that are too thick to be left on the lawn can be collected and used as mulch (1 to 2 inch layer) on vegetable and fruit plants; however, don't use clippings from grass that has been treated with an herbicide.
- Rake leaves and use as mulch (up to 6 inches thick before compaction) to prevent weeds in the garden. Spread leaves around tree trunks to reduce damage from lawn mowers.
- Fill bags with leaves and use as insulation in a cold frame.
- Till leaves directly into your vegetable garden or annual flower beds to break down by spring. Because leaf decomposition uses nitrogen from your soil, you may want to till in manure along with the leaves, or add a small amount of nitrogen fertilizer to enhance the process.
- Cover paths between raised beds with leaves in the fall to prevent weed growth the next spring,
- Use leaves as a mulch on bare ground to prevent erosion.

Process materials for use

- Prunings from larger trees and woody plants can be sawed into firewood lengths.
- Bark and wood chips created by chipping or shredding branches left over from pruning make effective, attractive mulches for trees, shrubs, and pathways.
- Leaves shredded with a lawn mower, chipper, or shredder can be used as mulch on beds or around larger plants (2 to 4 inches thick). Shredded leaves decompose rapidly.
- Remains of garden plants that are not diseased or insect-infested, such as corn stalks, can be chopped into small pieces (6 to 12 inches long) and used as a winter mulch in vegetable gardens to control erosion.

