

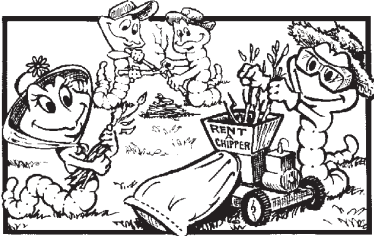
## What About Brush?

### Mulch

If you have access to a wood chipper, you can make excellent mulch out of small woody materials. Your community may also provide seasonal chipping services or a wood chip pile for public use.

Spread 1 to 2 inches of wood chips:

- around trees and shrubs to protect their trunks and roots.
- around plants in the garden to help suppress weeds.
- around play equipment and trails to provide a soft “paving.”



For more information on composting or state yard waste regulations, contact your local municipal recycling staff, a county extension agent or a DNR regional waste management specialist.

**Department Of Natural Resources  
Bureau of Waste Management  
P.O. Box 7921 Madison, WI 53707**

<sup>1</sup>For the Fast Compost Recipe, see *Home Composting: Reap A Heap of Benefits* (WA-072)

Illustrations: Joal Morris

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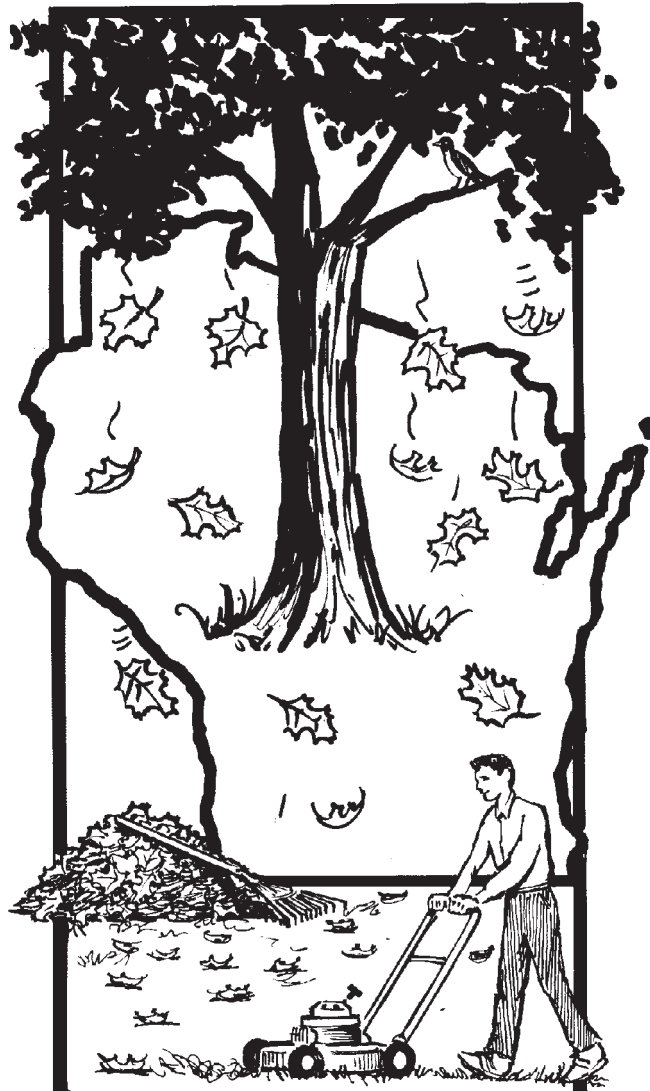
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# Yard Care Do Your Share!



**Wisconsin Department  
of Natural Resources  
PUB-WA-073 2023**

## Wisconsin's Recycling Law

Since January 1993, state law has banned yard waste — leaves, grass clippings, garden debris, and twigs, brush and branches smaller than 6 inches in diameter — from landfills and most incinerators. This law does not apply to stumps, roots or shrubs with intact root balls, or incinerators which burn waste to recover energy.

Because of a landfill's unique environment, yard waste in landfills produces methane gas and leachate, which can pollute the air and local water supplies.

Instead of landfilling yard waste, Wisconsinites compost. Nearly 300,000 tons of yard waste is composted by over 200 licensed yard waste facilities in Wisconsin. The amount of yard waste we divert from landfills is significantly more as many residents compost on their own property.



## A Burning Issue

Another method of leaf and brush disposal—backyard burning—pollutes the air, creates a fire hazard and is a nuisance to neighbors. Moisture in yard waste causes it to burn poorly and causes air pollution. State air and waste regulations and fire control rules restrict backyard burning, and many communities prohibit it entirely. For a cleaner, safer alternative to burning your yard waste, try mulching or composting!

## How To Grow A Healthy Lawn

### Reduce Thatch

Rake up all the thatch from your lawn in spring, **before** new grass shoots appear. Thatch is made up of roots, dead leaf sheaths and root stalks — not grass clippings. Unless you remove it, thatch will keep clippings from reaching the soil and decomposing properly.



### Grow Longer Grass

Let your grass grow to 3 to 5 inches in height. Longer grass will encourage a deeper root system, shade out weeds and help your lawn retain moisture.

### Cut Less Grass At A Time

Cut only the top third of your grass (around 1 inch) with each cutting. Your lawn can be damaged if too much of each grass blade is removed at one time. Lawns kept at the proper height also cut more easily and quickly.



### Leave Clippings On Your Lawn

Fertilize your lawn by leaving your grass clippings behind. Grass clippings are rich in nitrogen, an important fertilizing agent. Leaving clippings on your lawn all season is the same as one fertilizer application.

## Easy Lawn Care Tips



**Plant low-maintenance lawn covers.**

In shady spots or lightly-used area, try non-mowing native plants. Go to [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search “plant native plants to help nature” for suggestions.

**Water infrequently.** Consider recent rainfall and the weather forecast. Heavy clay soils require less water than sandy soils. Apply about 1 inch of water at a time to encourage deep, healthy roots.

**Water early in the morning.** Water applied in the afternoon evaporates too quickly, and watering in the evening can encourage disease problems.

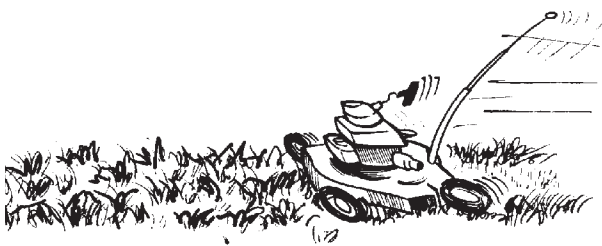
**Avoid over-fertilizing.** Too much fertilizer may actually harm your lawn, and the excess will wash away and pollute neighboring lakes and streams.

**Always use a sharp mower blade.** A sharp blade means finer clippings that decompose quickly.

**Test your soil every 3-4 years** for fertilizer levels and soil compaction. Contact your county extension agent for information on soil testing.

**Convert your bagging mower to a non-bagging mower.** Many manufacturers sell kits to convert lawn mowers. Always check your owner’s manual first for safety precautions.

**Consider leaving leaves on your lawn over winter for butterflies, bumble bees and other invertebrate species that use them as cover.**



## When Should I Collect My Clippings?

You should use a bagging mower or rake to collect your grass clippings in the following situations:



**The lawn is wet.** Matted clumps of wet grass can smother the lawn and slow its growth.



**More than 1 inch is cut.** Oversized clippings will tend to clump up and decompose very slowly.



**The lawn is heavily diseased.**

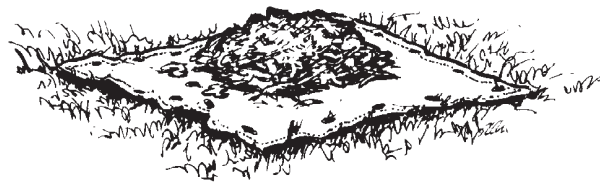
Clippings may spread the disease to healthy areas of your lawn. Collected diseased clippings and compost them using the *Fast Compost*<sup>1</sup> recipe.



**Your mower is unsafe to operate without a bagging attachment.** Use the clippings as a garden mulch or in a compost pile.



**During cool weather.** In early spring and late fall, cool temperatures may slow decomposition. You may want to collect clippings from the first and last two mowings.



### Try A Tarp!

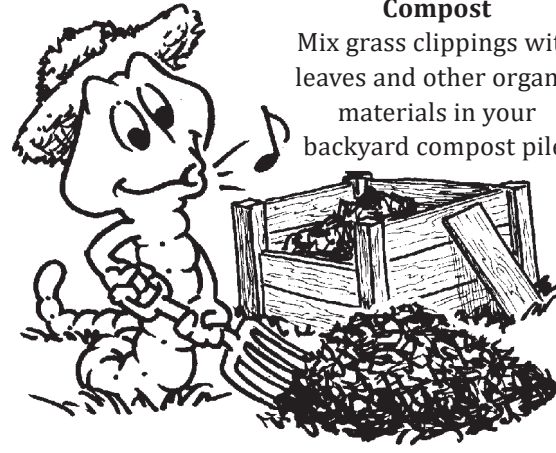
Tired of lugging around expensive, easily torn plastic bags when collecting or moving leaves and grass clippings? Use a large tarp (8 feet by 10 feet) with 1 inch holes every 3-4 feet around the edge.

Rake the materials onto the tarp, then put a rope through the holes and pull the tarp together to form a sack. Simply pull the load to move it. The tarp slides easily over grass, so minimal lifting is required.

## How Should I Use My Clippings?

### Compost

Mix grass clippings with leaves and other organic materials in your backyard compost pile.



Compost diseased clippings or grass treated with herbicides or insecticides with the *Fast Compost*<sup>1</sup> recipe. Finished compost can be safely added to your garden soil.

### Mulch

Clippings and other mulch materials act to suppress weeds, keep plant roots cool and moist and prevent soil from eroding or compacting.

Add grass clippings to gardens and around the base of trees and shrubs.



Mix the clippings slightly with the topsoil to prevent them from washing or blowing away.



## What Should I Do With My Leaves?

### Leave them until spring

Many invertebrates including butterflies, moths and bumble bees rely on leaves for cover over winter. If leaving leaves until spring isn't possible, place them in garden beds or rake them into a big pile. Keeping the leaves whole is preferred, since chopping or shredding leaves may destroy eggs, caterpillars and chrysalis.

### Compost

Leaves make an excellent addition to any compost pile.



Black walnut trees contain a growth inhibitor in their leaves and root systems. Compost black walnut leaves using the *Fast Compost*<sup>1</sup> recipe to neutralize the growth inhibitor before adding your garden soil.

### Mulch

Leaves are rich in carbon, phosphorus and potassium - all essential nutrients needed by plants.

During the winter, leaves minimize the alternate freezing and thawing of the soil which often damages plant roots.



Pine needles and oak leaves make a good mulch for acid-loving perennials like rhododendrons, lilies of the valley, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, spruces, yews, butterfly weed and cardinal flowers.