



Use Leaves as a Resource

When the leaves begin to fall this month remember that it's important to rake them up so they don't wash down the storm drains and into our lakes and streams. If left in the street, leaves will flow into the nearest lake or stream and can cause pea soup – green algae blooms next summer. Leaves are an excellent source of nutrients for your gardens and lawn, so now is a great time to start a compost pile and make use of all those leaves.

Here's how to begin:

- Build a compost bin out of scrap wood or wire enclosure. You may also find a compost bin at a local hardware or garden store. Place it in location where it is easy to add material and it's partially shaded.
- Small twigs and wood chips are a good starting point for developing a compost pile. Then you can add leaves and grass clippings. Consider mulching the leaves with your lawn mower before adding them to your compost bin.
- Alternate green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials when adding to the compost bin. Green: plant trimmings, grass clippings, green leaves. Brown: straw, dried grasses, sawdust, dried leaves and shredded newspaper
- Start adding food waste such as raw fruit, vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters to your compost pile; throw in egg and nut shells as well. Don't put raw fruit and vegetable scraps in the garbage disposal, use them as a resource to amend your lawn and garden soil. You'll also reduce the amount of trash you send to the landfill by composting food scraps.
- Do not add food wastes such as meats, dairy or food with oils to your compost bin.
- Occasionally add water to allow the microbes to grow and travel around in the pile to decompose materials. The compost should feel like a wrung – out sponge.

Concerned about a smelly compost bin? Not to worry - it may indicate the pile is too wet, so add some dried leaves or dried grass clippings. Also, turn your pile to aerate the compost. As long as you keep meats, dairy and food with oils out of your compost pile you shouldn't have any odors.

Compost can improve the quality of any type of soil. Adding finished compost to clay soil will make it more porous, creating tiny holes and passageways that help the soil drain more quickly. Adding compost to sandy soils helps retain moisture and nutrients where it can be utilized by plant roots.

The leaves this fall are a resource and provide free natural fertilizer for your lawn and gardens. Consider creating a compost pile to keep the leaves and grass clippings out of our lakes and streams as well as to use the decomposed material on your lawn and gardens. For more information on composting contact Dan Miller with the Scott Clean Water Education Program at 952-492-5424 or dmiller@co.scott.mn.us.