



For immediate release

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Gearing up for the Fall: Turning Leaves into Gold

Landscape refuse, such as leaves, grass clippings and trimmings, accounts for up to 20 percent of the waste being put into landfills (Source: UGA). The good news is that soils can often be improved and made more productive or conditioned by simply adding compost derived from organic matter like grass clippings, vegetable scraps and leaves.

Composting is an easy way to effectively use yard trimmings and waste for the enrichment of dry and hard soils. Gardeners often refer to composting as turning “garbage into gold.” Composting practices can be either simple or involve more complex steps. The basic premise is that brown material (leaves, straw and shredded wood) mixed with green material (grass and food scraps) in combination with water, air and high temperatures create an environment for yard debris, grass clippings and food scraps to break down.

If you have children, then composting can benefit the whole family as a family project or as a science project. Composting saves money, helps gardens and container plants by improving the fertility of the soil, saves water by retaining moisture, benefits the environment by saving hauling fuel, landfill space and reduces the amount of excess fertilizers and chemical additives that are applied to the soil.

When it rains, leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste can be carried away, along with nutrients and pesticides (insecticides and herbicides) that have been applied to them, untreated down streets, drainage ditches and storm drains into rivers, lakes and streams. Too many nutrients in our waterways can cause algal (or algae) blooms. The blooms may discolor water, create unsightly scum, and lead to unpleasant tastes and odors that affect the quality of water for irrigation and recreation.

Many items around the yard that are considered waste can be composted, including grass clippings, shrub prunings, flowers, leaves, weeds, sawdust, vegetable scraps, uncoated papers and even hair. Other wastes from the home, such as butter, bones, cat manure, fish scraps, oils peanut butter and meat should not be composted. These things attract rodents and can create a foul odor in your yard. Fresh compost will have a pleasant aroma. Foul odors can occur when using compostable materials if there is too much green material and not enough brown material and oxygen. Odors can be alleviated by turning or poking the pile and maintaining a well-balanced mixture of half-green and half-brown materials. One basic compost recipe is as simple as chopping compostables (the more you chop the faster the decomposition), mix two thirds dry brown material (leaves, straw, shredded wood), one-third green material (grass and food scraps) and water.

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*The **Clean Water Campaign** is a cooperative, multi-agency public education initiative spearheaded by local governments in metro Atlanta, supported by the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District and managed by the Atlanta Regional Commission. Its mission is to build awareness of water quality problems and solutions in the Atlanta region. For more information about the Clean Water Campaign, contact Kelley O'Brien at 404-463-3259.*

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