

# Yard Waste Fact Sheet



## **WATER POLLUTION**

Sources of water pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced in recent years. Now, more than 60% of water pollution comes from things like runoff from homes, excess fertilizer, and pet waste. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. So, believe it or not, the biggest source of water pollution today is not industry – it is actually households like yours. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water. And it starts with realizing that *our sewers and storm systems are separate – what goes into storm drains flows directly into the environment, untreated.*

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## **WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH MY YARD HABITS?**

Yard waste such as grass clippings, leaves, and branches are extremely high in nitrogen and phosphorus. When put back on the yard itself or composted, this is great because it serves as a natural fertilizer. However, when this waste ends up in our waterways (by being emptied into storm drains, blown out to the street, or dumped into a lake or stream), it acts as a fertilizer causing excess algae growth and depleting the water's oxygen content, making it difficult for aquatic life to survive.

## **FACTS AND FIGURES**

- Homeowners use ten times more chemicals per acre on lawns than farmers use on crops.
- If lawns were classified as a crop, it would rank as the fifth-largest in the country, based on area.
- Multiple homeowners have reported seeing neighbors dump bags of yard waste directly into our area water bodies this year. This does not just affect those neighbors, but harms water quality for all of us.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

How can you have a beautiful yard and help keep our waters clean?

- **Do NOT Dump** - Remember, storm drains lead directly to our waterways. Do NOT dump grass clippings or any other yard waste down storm drains or into any water body.
- **Sweep** – Sweep grass clippings, leaves, and fertilizers that get on the driveway or sidewalk back onto your lawn to keep them out of our storm drains. Use dry cleanup methods (sweep with a broom rather than spray with a hose).
- **Use a Mulching Mower** – Leave grass clippings and leaves on the lawn. Run over them with your lawn mower to cut them up more, and then leave them there. They provide nutrients and are the best fertilizer for your lawn.
- **Compost** – Dispose of lawn waste in compost piles. Making compost results in a rich natural fertilizer for your plants or garden, productively reusing yard waste rather than throwing it away, and saving you money in the process. Go to [www.compostguide.com](http://www.compostguide.com) for basic instructions.