

Keep Water Quality in Mind during Fall Yard Waste Cleanup

With the changing season comes beautiful fall colors and, along with that, piles of leaves and other yard waste to clean up. Rain to Rivers of Western Wisconsin, a partnership between twelve western Wisconsin municipalities, wants to remind individuals about what they can do at this time of year to help keep lakes and streams clean by properly managing yard waste.

The most effective action homeowners can take is to make sure fallen leaves don't wash down directly into rivers, streams, or lakes. The problem with that lies in the nutrients the leaves contain. Decaying leaves release nitrogen and phosphorus, which can cause nuisance algae growth. The decomposing leaves also can rob streams and lakes of oxygen needed to support life.

One way to make sure leaves don't pollute area waterways is to compost your leaves into valuable mulch to place in your vegetable and flower gardens. Mulch improves soil health and plant productivity, and making it is free. Another option is to spread leaves in garden beds or under shrubs. Rake whole leaves over flower or vegetable beds as a soil nutrient supplement and to help reduce unwanted weeds.

If your property has too many leaves for use in your garden or landscaping, contact your garbage hauler for details about yard waste handling.

Leaves are a pollutant to water – so what about all of the trees that grow naturally along a river bank? In the natural environment, leaves tend to stay on the landscape and decompose there. A relatively small amount of leaf litter actually finds its way into the water and therefore does not contribute significantly to water pollution.