

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Take the “Waste” Out of Acreage Maintenance

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Many different types of structures, both homemade and purchased, can be used for composting, such as this wooden pallet bin.

Routine lawn and yard maintenance, whether you live in the city or country, is usually on every homeowner’s to-do list. Keeping your property neat and green often becomes a point of personal pride, with all your country neighbors competing for the title of “best-kept homestead”. But there are ways to reduce the time, energy, and money you spend on property maintenance, and minimize landscape waste that does to the burn pile or landfill.

Here’s how you can reduce landscape “waste” and transform it into “wealth”.

Plan and Evaluate Your Yard

Reconsidering your routines may require a little time and discipline – as opposed to proceeding as usual. But good, environmentally friendly ideas should emerge. The key is to lessen waste by first rethinking, while still keeping time and fertilizer inputs to a minimum.

Use Organic Mulches

Recycle leaves, wood chips, grass clippings, and other yard trimmings as mulch to retain soil moisture, reduce weed growth, moderate daily and seasonal soil temperatures, and reduce soil erosion. Consider investing in a wood chipper, either by yourself or with your country friends, so that woody debris can be chipped and reused.

Manage Lawn Areas Wisely

Recycle nutrients by leaving clippings on the lawn where they belong. Returning the clippings for an entire summer results in the application of 1 lb. of Nitrogen/1,000 sq.ft. to your lawn. That's the equivalent of one fertilizer application, and it doesn't cost you anything!

If you must collect them, reuse the grass clippings as mulch or compost. Proper care keeps lawns growing vigorously, which greatly reduces disease and pesticide use.

Use Leaves as a Resource

Small amounts of leaves, when shredded with a lawn mower and left to filter down into the grass, are an organic nutrient source. Chopping up leaves also reduces the need for raking. Leaves can also be reused to mulch perimeter plantings or as an ingredient in compost.

Fertilize Conservatively and Carefully

Test your soil and reduce fertilizer use when possible to avoid excessive plant growth. Excessive plant growth = potential yard waste.

Sweep up and reuse fertilizer that falls on paved surfaces. Otherwise fertilizer runs off your property into nearby lakes and streams, contributing to algae and pollution.

Direct Downspouts into Planting Beds or Lawns

Redirect this precious natural resource to your yard rather than the pavement. Runoff from downspouts directed onto paved surfaces carry pollutants like fertilizer, pesticides and motor oil to lakes and streams. A rain garden is a concave planting bed designed to catch rainwater, and allow it to filter down through the soil.

[Stormwater Management: Installing a Rain Garden in Your Yard](#)

Try Natural Landscaping

Naturalize at least a portion of your yard to reduce maintenance, grass clippings, pesticide and fertilizer usage. Consider seeding perimeter grassy areas with native grass. Add a planting of native shrubs and grasses as a barrier near streams and creeks to prevent runoff of landscape products into the water. Enjoy the attractive alternatives as your property contributes to a richer ecosystem.

Plant Ground Covers

Reduce impractical lawn areas (steep slopes, shady areas, low spots) and keep tree roots moist and cool. Less lawn means fewer grass clippings. It also can reduce your time spent mowing, and the amount of pesticide and fertilizer used.

[Selecting a Ground Cover](#)

Select Plants for Proper Size and Vigor

Reduce trimmings by selecting semi-dwarf or dwarf fruit tree varieties. Always plan for the mature height of trees and shrubs before planting to minimize pruning needs. Pest-resistant plant

varieties reduce both chemical usage and dead wood that must be removed. Match your plant selections to your property's soil, light conditions and topography for optimum plant growth.

Create a Compost Pile or Bin

Recycle excess landscape waste by composting, which speeds up the natural process of decomposition. Compost is a great soil amendment that improves water-holding capacity in sandy soil, and improves water infiltration in heavy clay soil. It provides nutrients for plant growth, and fosters increased populations of beneficial soil microbes.

Many different types of structures, both homemade and purchased, can be used for composting. Homeowners often used recycled materials, like wooden pallets, to create a compost bin, and using a bin has the added advantage of screening the compost from view.

[How to Build A Compost Bin](#)