# Healthy Lawn and Garden

Techniques to help improve the health of home lawns and gardens, save time and money, and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

RESOURCE RECOVERY AND RECYCLING AUTHORITY OF SOUTHWEST OAKLAND COUNTY

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## Manage Yard Clippings at Home

Yard clippings are defined as leaves, grass clippings, vegetable or other garden debris, shrubbery, or brush or tree trimmings less than 4 feet in length and 2 inches in diameter. Many of these materials can be easily managed at home through backyard composting and grasscycling. These techniques can improve the health of home lawns and gardens, save time and money, and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

### Making the Most of Your Lawn & Your Time...
### Grasscycling!

***Grasscycling***, a simple and natural approach to lawn care, is the practice of leaving grass clippings on the lawn or using them as mulch. Grass clippings are 75-85% water and decompose quickly. Through decomposition, grass clippings release nitrogen and other valuable nutrients resulting in a greener, healthier lawn without the use of fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides. Inappropriate application of fertilizer contributes to pollution of waterways which can impact the health of wildlife and aquatic species.

With ***grasscycling***, there is no raking or bagging of grass - which means less time spent on lawn care! Consequently, eliminating the use of bags, reducing the frequency of stops and starts of the lawn mower to bag grass, and using grass clippings to add nutrients to the lawn instead of commercial fertilizer saves money. Less time using the mower will also save gas and reduce your carbon footprint!

## Grasscycling How-To & Tips

Replace your conventional lawn mower blade with a mulching blade or use a mulching mower. Mulching mowers and blades are designed to allow the yard debris to be cut multiple times during the mowing process.

Mow grass to no more than 3 inches tall. For healthier grass, remove only 1/3 of the grass blade at a time, and no more than 1" total. Leave the grass clippings where they fall and allow them to decompose.

1. Mow when the lawn is dry to avoid uneven dispersion.
2. For wet lawns, raise the initial cutting height and gradually lower to proper height on follow-up passes.
3. Use excess clippings as a mulch around trees, bushes, or in the garden. Or, leave them on the lawn.
4. Any clips that blow from under the mower onto sidewalks or driveways should be swept back onto the lawn to prevent them from ending up in surface water or drains, where nutrients could increase the growth of algae and other aquatic plants that can deplete oxygen in the water.

## DID YOU KNOW?

When yard clippings decompose in landfills, they create methane gas. The US EPA has identified landfills as the single largest source of methane ($CH_4$), a potent greenhouse gas that is 23 times more efficient at trapping heat than carbon dioxide ($CO_2$).

Landfills contribute to about 34% of all man-made methane released into the atmosphere in the United States *(U.S. EPA, 2007).*

## HERE'S A FACT...

During the spring and summer months, grass clippings account for up to 50% of one's total yard trimmings.

## MYTHBUSTER

Leaving grass clippings on your lawn does not cause thatch.

Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County
contact us at 20000 W. Eight Mile Rd. Southfield, MI 48075 online at www.RRRASOC.org or call 248.208.2270

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## Backyard Composting

Composting is the result of aerobic bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms breaking down organic materials. Households produce a significant amount of organic material that is well-suited for composting such as vegetative food scraps from the kitchen, dead houseplants, leaves, twigs, grass clippings, garden trimmings, and weeds.

## How To Compost

***Materials Needed:*** Sources of carbon, sources of nitrogen, air, and water.

***Ingredients:*** Green and brown yard waste; water as needed.

Your compost bin or pile will need more carbon (brown) materials than nitrogen (green) materials; about 25-30 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen (25-30:1).

Carbon (brown) materials are dry leaves, woody plant trimmings, paper, straw, pine needles, and sawdust. Nitrogen (green) materials are kitchen scraps (no meat, fat, or bones), leafy plant trimmings, herbs and vegetables, livestock manure (no dog, cat, or human manure), weeds (foliage only), pet bedding, hair and fur, feathers, and hay.

Remember the **4 Rules of Composting:** Quality Materials, Adequate Volume of Pile, Consistent Moisture, and Good Air Circulation.

### Directions:

1. Mix one part green yard waste with two parts brown to form a pile; an average size is 4'x4'x4'. For fast composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
2. Mix in one inch of soil.
3. Keep the pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge and turn it every week to let air in.

*Finished compost will take between four weeks and one year, depending on how often you turn it and how well you maintain the moisture of the pile.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

As much as 35% of home waste is made up of kitchen scraps and yard clippings, which are idea for backyard composting!

### COMPOST:

- Leaves
- Grass Clippings
- Dead Plants
- Weeds
- Vegetative Food Scraps
- Fruit Wastes
- Manure
- Straw/Hay
- Coffee Grounds

### DON'T COMPOST:

- Weeds Gone to Seed
- Lime
- Invasive Weeds
- Wood Ashes
- BBQ Charcoal
- Dairy Products
- Meat, Grease & Bones
- Cat, Dog & Human Waste
- Contaminated Items
- Branches & Wood Chunks

## Tips for Composting Grass Clippings

Grass clippings are mostly water and are rich in nitrogen, causing them to compact. This increases the chance of them becoming anaerobic (absence of oxygen), matting together and emitting an ammonia-like odor. Tips to avoid this include:

- Compost grass clippings in thin layers, intermixed in a 2-to-1 ratio with brown materials such as dry leaves or plant debris.
- Save and bag fall leaves for spring/summer grass composting.
- Use a thick layer of coarse brown material at the bottom of the pile or your bin for aeration.
- Let grass clippings dry out for a couple of days before composting.
- If you're attempting to compost a large quantity of grass clippings with a good source of brown material, turn the pile using a compost aeration tool every few days to get air into the materials. This will help to prevent potential odors.

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