



Village of Ossining Environmental Advisory  
Council  
Environmental News Brief

## Issue #2: Fall Yard Maintenance & Composting

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### Fall Fertilizing Tips

October and November are the best time to fertilize your lawn. Fertilizing in the fall will help it hibernate through the cold and emerge strong and healthy in the springtime.

#### **Here are some tips for fertilizing in an environmentally friendly manner:**

- Perform a soil test to determine the nutrient composition in the soil and perform a pH test to measure your soil's acidity. Grass grows best in soil with a pH between 6.5 and 7. Soil testing is easy, and determining the condition of your soil will help you to determine how much fertilizer or lime your lawn will need. Soil test kits are available at most local hardware stores and nurseries.
- Use slow release non-phosphorous fertilizers. Fertilizers of this type will usually state this on the bag. Apply only as much as is absolutely needed to avoid the buildup of thatch on your lawn.
- Fertilize on a week with a clear forecast. This will minimize the possibility of stormwater runoff washing the fertilizer into streams and ponds. At the minimum, you should allow 24 hours between the application of fertilizer and any anticipated rain event. Remember, anything you put on the ground can end up in our waters.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to reduce the amount of fertilizer needed by as much as 25-50%.
- Rake a thin (1/2 inch or less) layer of **compost** into areas of your lawn that need extra fertilization.

See [Westchester County's Lawn Fertilizer Best Practices](#) for more information.

#### **Be Advised: New Westchester County Fertilizer Law:**

- Fertilizer cannot be applied between December 1 and April 1, when the ground is frozen and more likely to produce runoff.
- Fertilizer cannot be applied on impervious surfaces such as driveways, parking lots, roadways or sidewalks.
- Fertilizer cannot be applied to lawn areas that are within 20 feet of any surface water, unless a natural vegetative buffer at least 10 feet wide separates the lawn area and the surface water (ponds, streams, etc).
- Starting in July 2011, phosphorous-based fertilizer will not be permitted for use unless the need is first confirmed by a soil test.

Source: Westchestergov.com

#### **Additional Online Resources:**

[Westchester County Phosphorous Fertilizer Ban](#)

[Grassroots Healthy Lawns Program – Homeowner Tips](#)

[NYSDEC – Green Lawns and Gardens Tips](#)

[US Environmental Protection Agency – Healthy Lawn, Healthy Environment](#)

## Fall is the Best Time to Start a Compost Pile!

### **What is compost?**

Compost is a material created by the breakdown of organic waste through natural processes. When these wastes are combined into a backyard compost pile or compost bin, helpful bacteria break down the matter into a dark, rich material that can be used for a variety of purposes. It is a natural fertilizer, increases soil nutrient content, retains moisture, and can reduce the amount of water, fertilizer, and pesticides needed for your lawn. Fall is a great time to begin your compost pile. Since you'll likely have a lot of dead leaves to rake at this time of year, these can serve as the basis for your compost pile.



Compost's dark color comes from its abundance of nitrogen, a substance that can be beneficial for your lawn's health.

### **What kinds of waste products can I compost?**

Composting can reduce the amount of household waste entering the waste stream. The ingredients for a compost pile consist of high-carbon organic material (or "browns"), high-nitrogen organic material (or "greens"), and water. In general, it is best to maintain a ration of 3 parts browns to 1 part greens when creating your compost pile to minimize odors and deter pests.

**Brown** materials include:

- Sticks and twigs
- Shredded dead leaves
- Cardboard
- Shredded newspaper and other paper products

**Green** materials include:

- Grass clippings and weeds (as long as they are chemical-free)
- Fruit and vegetable waste
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Teabags

Items that you should not use for composting include:

- Animal products, including dairy and meat
- Fats, grease, and oils
- Pet waste
- Diseased plants

### **What can I use compost for?**

- Treating fungal diseases on lawn plants
- Weed control
- Landscape bedding for plants
- Mulching
- Fertilizer

#### **Additional Online Resources:**

[Westchester County Dept. of Environmental Facilities – Backyard Composting](#)  
[NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation – Composting at Home](#)  
[US Environmental Protection Agency – Create Your Own Compost Pile](#)

## Leaf Collection: Don't Forget!

With the arrival of fall, you'll likely have plenty of dead leaves from the trees in your yard. Prompt collection of leaves is more important than you might think. Here are some things to keep in mind regarding leaf collection:

- Rake your leaves as soon as possible. The longer you leave them on the ground, the more time they have to cause damage to your lawn. Leaves can smother your lawn by depriving it of sunlight, causing the grasses to die and leading to an increase in invasive plants and pests.
- Make sure that leaves from your yard don't end up in the street. Leaves, thatch, and pine needles raked into the street can be washed into the Village's stormwater system, clogging it and causing water to overflow from stormwater inlets, which can result in localized flooding.
- Without prompt collection, leaves can eventually end up in ponds and streams, creating a damaging layer of shade that disrupts photosynthesis. They also release nitrogen as they decay, disrupting aquatic ecosystems and causing algae blooms, which can kill fish and other forms of aquatic life.
- Put your leaves to work! If you collect them and add them together with other organic yard and household waste, they can be used as part of your compost pile.



Prompt leaf collection becomes important as the colors change and leaves begin to fall.

## [Village of Ossining 2009 Yard Waste Program](#)

For proper disposal of leaves, branches, and other organic yard waste, please place these items into biodegradable paper bags and leave them curbside on designated days for collection by the Village Department of Public Works or place these items curbside in trash bins clearly marked "organic waste" for DPW collection. Biodegradable bags can be obtained at the John Paul Rodrigues Operations Center, located at 101 Route 9A, and at local hardware stores, nurseries, and grocery stores. Leaves may also be left in piles curbside for collection by vacuum truck during the fall season. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information on the Village's 2009 Yard Waste Program.

## **Where can I find lawn care supplies here in Ossining?**

Below is a list of Ossining-based nurseries and hardware stores:

### **Nurseries:**

- Sun Valley Nursery (762-6161) - 136 Croton Avenue
- Green Thumb Seasonal Nursery (923-3003) - 345 North Highland Avenue
- Pinesbridge Nursery (941-7663) - 90 Pinesbridge Road

### **Hardware stores:**

- Ossining Hardware (941-3666) - 75 Croton Avenue
- Melrose Lumber - (941-1888) - 178 Croton Avenue