

## Tired of Raking? Consider Leaving the Leaves

Fall has arrived! For many of us, this season is defined by falling leaves, and the task of cleaning up after them. But did you know that leaving the leaves behind can help improve your lawn and stormwater health? Read on to learn how you can help keep local water bodies and your lawn healthy this season!

### Rejuvenate Your Lawn

Did you know that leaf litter contains many essential nutrients that can help keep your lawn healthy? As the leaves breakdown, they provide a slow, constant source of nutrients for your lawn. Leaving the leaves to decompose will provide your lawn with nutrients similar to those in fertilizer, but at no cost and



without chemicals! However, it is important to use caution when implementing this method, as too many leaves can create excessively moist conditions that can foster mold and disease. To prevent the excessive buildup of moisture, begin removing leaves once 50% or more of your lawn is covered by them, or mow over your leaves so that they are shredded into small pieces. This shredding method accelerates the breakdown process, traps less moisture, and decreases the likelihood of leaves blowing where they are not welcome, such as into storm drains. In addition, any excess shredded leaves can be added to your garden beds where they will act as a natural mulch.

### Curb Your Leaves Wisely

Have you ever spent hours raking your leaves to the curb, only for the wind to negate all of your hard work? When leaves are left piled on the curb, they can be blown into a number of undesirable locations, including back into your lawn, or into the street and storm drains. While leaves are a natural part of the environment, large amounts of them entering storm drains can harm local water quality. This is because as leaves breakdown, they release similar nutrients to those found in fertilizers, such as Nitrogen and Phosphorus. And just as excess fertilizer runoff can harm local water quality and cause algal blooms, so too can excess nutrients from leaves. This season, consider bagging any leaves you place on the curb in paper lawn bags so that the wind cannot undo your hard work and the leaves don't end up in storm drains. Be sure to check with your local municipality regarding yard waste pickup procedures. If you do choose to rake your leaves to the curb, consider doing so as close to collection day as possible, to decrease any unwanted spread of leaves.



### Let the Water Flow

In addition to jeopardizing water quality, leaves can also clog up storm drains, pipes, and sewers, leading to localized flooding and drainage issues. Just as leaves can clog up and wreak havoc on your gutters, they can wreak a similar havoc on storm sewers and pipes. To help keep these stormwater management tools functioning, remember to keep both your gutters and storm drains clear of leaves and other debris this season. It is important to note that when cleaning gutters or storm drains, safety comes first!

#### **Note for National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Stormwater Phase II Communities:**