

Waukesha County Green Gardener: *Natural/Organic Lawn & Garden Care*



Did you know that the average date for the first frost in Waukesha County is between October 4-10? That should be enough encouragement to start winding things down in the yard and garden. Landscaping issues that stood out this summer:

Nationally, there was an EPA ban, followed by a DuPont withdrawal, of the herbicide *Imprelis* from the market after hundreds of thousands of trees throughout the US were killed from lawn applications. Species affected included Norway Spruce, White Pine and Balsam Fir. The herbicide also does not break down in the composting process.



Imprelis Damage

Locally, it was the Japanese Beetle invasion, along with a bumper crop of chipmunks, mentioned most often by residents at our compost workshops and Green Garden Parties. While much has been said in the media about the beetle abundance due to last year's heavy rainfalls, less has been said about the fact that they prefer short grass to lay their eggs. It's a good reminder to leave your grass at a healthy summer height of 3-3.5 inches.



Japanese Beetle

If the chipmunks routed out your potted plants and flower beds with a vengeance, next year, consider trying these "home-grown" suggestions that have worked for other gardeners: Use small twigs or dry, broken egg shells as a mulch. As we all know, what deters one chipmunk may not work for another, but it might be worth a try!
Enjoy the beauty of the fall season!



Eastern Chipmunk

Waukesha County Dept. of Parks & Land Use Education Staff

Fall/Winter Composting

Fall is a great time to start composting. Carbon materials are abundant this time of year with falling leaves and spent garden plants available. While the process will be a bit slower due to cooler temperatures, the compost will be ready for use the following spring or summer. Adding nitrogen materials from the kitchen, including fruit and vegetable scraps, can help speed up the composting process for large quantities of leaves and yard materials. Leaves can be further broken down by mowing before adding them to the pile. Ideally, having a spot to store excess fall leaves for next year's carbon source is a great idea! A bin, bag or back corner will do.



People often ask if they can continue to add materials to the pile in winter. The answer is "yes", providing you realize that most often it is high nitrogen items from the kitchen being added, and a good dose of carbon materials will be needed in the spring when the pile thaws. Over winter, decomposition slows down or stops in most Wisconsin compost piles. Small piles will freeze. The freeze/thaw cycle helps break down the cellular structure of materials. When spring arrives, bacteria will have more surface area to work on and the pile will heat up again. There is no need to aerate the pile when adding materials in winter. In fact, if the pile isn't totally frozen already, aerating will allow heat to escape.

For more information, visit waukeshacounty.gov/composting .

Autumn Lawn Maintenance

With falling temperatures and recent rainfall, for a few weeks, at least, there could be increased lawn growth. If you've been following best practices for lawn care during the summer by mowing the grass high to keep it healthy and shade weed seeds, typically you should be able to start lowering the mower blade by 1/2 to 1 inch. Watch for any weeds on the lawn that have gone to seed and hand dig or pull those that are few and far between.

Mulch leaves into the lawn as they fall, or collect them for the compost bin. As temperatures really cool down, grass growth will come to a slow halt. Mow the grass low to about 2 inches. Long, matted grass from ice and snow can be a problem in spring, and is also a haven for field mice and voles that leave telltale turf lines from their winter trailblazing.

An application of compost before winter can help the lawn maintain a good number of soil microbes heading into the cold season. Even though the grass is no longer photosynthesizing, plenty of activity takes place underground until the soil freezes solid. Rake 1/8 to 1/4 inch of compost into the lawn, or consider hiring a local professional to do a compost tea application.



Compost Bins Available at Retzer Nature Center



If you missed our summer truckload sale of compost bins, there is a great bin available at [Retzer Nature Center](#) through the Friends group. The Home Composter sells for \$68, with a portion of the proceeds going towards the Friends' support of the nature center. This bin is highly portable, has a wide top and cover, and holds a cubic yard--the ideal size for backyard composting. Also sold at the gift shop is a "Kitchen Collector" that fits under the sink for collecting food scraps to take out to the pile or bin. These items make great gifts for both the budding and experienced gardener! There is also a Compost Demonstration area & field lab behind the nature center building for residents to learn composting basics and to observe different styles of bins to build or purchase.



MAKE A GIFT FOR THE GARDENER: GARDENER'S TOOL CADDY

Adult Program held at Retzer Nature Center

Use this functional tote to store your basketry tools or gardening supplies!

The wood base and dividers keep you organized with generous compartments and storage options.

Spokes are begun in the slotted base; sides are woven in the start/stop method with accent weavers in your choice of colors.

Weavers, this is the tote you've been asking for! Caddy is 20" long x 8" wide x 11" tall with the handle.

Gardeners, start dreaming about next years' growing season! All level weavers welcome.

Bring the following supplies with you to class: Clippers or strong scissors, pencil, small flat screwdriver, bucket or dishpan, several clip clothespins, and old towel and a bag lunch.

Maximum number of registrants 12, minimum 5.

DATE: Saturday, November 12

TIME: 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

FEE: \$66.00

REGISTER BY: Monday, October 24

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