

**J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON****Autumn timely season  
to start composting**

*Welcome to the first installment of a column that will appear every other Friday. In addition to discussing environmental issues, I will examine ways in which we can improve our common habitat. I hope that this column will generate some reader response. If you have a suggestion for a column, a gripe, a success story or whatever, please write it down and send it to me in care of the Columbia Daily Tribune, PO Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.*

The geese are migrating, and the beautiful fall weather signals the beginning of another autumn ritual — raking leaves. It seems timely to review the options for dealing with all types of yard waste.

Most of you are aware that Missouri passed a solid-waste law in 1990, which prohibits the dumping of yard waste into landfills. Yard waste was targeted because it can be easily recycled and it accounted for nearly 20 percent of all the waste entering our landfills.

The best way to deal with grass and leaves is to not remove them from the lawn. Instead, cut grass more often, but at a higher length. This will allow the clippings to settle down in between the plants, where they will decompose and return nutrients to the soil. Leaves can be run over with a mower until they settle into the lawn.

Contrary to popular belief, grass clippings do not cause thatch; thatch is actually derived from the roots and rhizomes of old plants. In fact, by allowing grass and leaves to add to the sod, thatchy material will be decomposed more quickly. Also keep in mind that if you remove clippings and leaves from your lawn, you are taking away nutrients that will probably have to be replaced with fertilizers later on.

If you do remove clippings and leaves from your lawn, it is best to turn them into compost. Compost is organic material that has been broken down by small organisms, such as bacteria and worms. After yard waste has been composted, it makes an excellent fertilizer that can be used to enrich soil in gardens or flower pots. It can also be sprinkled back on your lawn.

The basic composting system comprises a holding bin that is between 3 and 5 feet square. Bins should be constructed so that air can get to the

compost. You can build your own bin with wire fencing or wood, or purchase one at a local store. Bins that have a side that can be opened to remove compost are best.

Although layering the materials in the bin will work, mixing the materials together will produce compost faster. You should periodically check the moistness of your compost pile and add water when it becomes dry. If you keep the pile moist, your yard waste will turn into a resource in three to nine months.

Besides leaves and grass, you can compost branches and limbs that have been mulched or torn up. You can also add vegetable scraps from your kitchen, but never compost meat; meat will attract animals, will smell bad and could pose a health hazard.

As a last resort, you can put your yard waste into the clear bags provided by the city. Each home in Columbia receives 10 bags a year — five in the spring and five in the fall. Additional bags are available from local grocery stores and from the Westlake Hardware store on Worley Street for 50 cents each. These bags are picked up with your trash and recyclables. The material is then composted at the city composting facility. You can also set bundles — no larger than 4 feet by 2 feet — of tree branches out for curbside pickup.

You can take your yard waste — leaves, grass clippings, branches and brush — directly to the compost area at the city landfill. Grass and leaves, but not branches, can be delivered to the city mulch site on Schwabe Lane.

There is a "Don't Bag It" display in the lobby of the Daniel Boone County-City Building, with free information about yard waste options. This display will run through the month of October. Also, on Oct. 31, the city will hold an open house at the composting facility at the landfill on Peabody Road.

You can obtain a flier about composting from the Public Works Department by calling 874-7280 or by stopping by the office at 1313 Lakeview Ave.

The Missouri Environmental Improvement and Energy Resources Authority also offers information on yard wastes and composting. You can call the organization at 1-751-4919, or write to PO Box 744, 225 Madison St., Jefferson City, Mo., 65102.