

# SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

October 2009

Island County, Washington

Issue No. 60

*This issue was written by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator in Island County*

Leaves are something we both love and hate. In the summer, they provide cooling shade. In early fall, they paint the landscape with a beautiful variety of colors. Later in the season, though, they begin to fall, blanketing our lawns and filling our gutters and downspouts. This issue deals with the options you have for disposing of not only fallen leaves, but also the branches and limbs that come down during the fall storms.

## Taking Care of Fall Yard Waste

In the past, one of the rites of fall was to gather all the leaves, branches and downed limbs into a big pile and burn them. It was common to smell the smoke of burning leaves on a sunny fall weekend. Some people still do this in areas it's allowed, and there isn't a burn ban in effect, but this option can be hazardous to your health and the environment. Each ton of vegetation that is burned emits 180 pounds of fine particles, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and volatile organic compounds into the air. This can be bothersome to some people, and can be physically debilitating to folks with respiratory ailments.

Another common disposal method that we now recognize as being hazardous is the dumping the leaves over your bluff or onto your beach. As described in the April 2009 issue of the Shore Stewards News, this discarded waste does not decompose quickly, and can pile up, suffocating plants and the organisms underneath. Fall and winter rains soak the leaves, adding weight to the slope that can cause erosion and slides. Dumping of any yard waste over the bluff or onto the beach is a dangerous practice you should avoid at all times.

One option in disposing of a thin layer of leaves on your lawn is to mow them with your mulching mower, lowering your blade height to about 2". You may need to make a few passes to shred the leaves, and you may need to remove some of the leaf layer to avoid smothering the lawn, which can cause die-back and make the lawn more susceptible to diseases. A light amount of these shredded leaves will decompose, adding nutrients to your soil. Shredded leaves also make great mulch for use around shrubs and trees, or in your vegetable garden. The leaves will retard the growth of weeds, protect against winter freeze, maintain soil moisture, and will improve soil structure and add nutrients as they decompose. One way to create leaf mulch is to put the dry leaves through a chipper-shredder. (Wet leaves can clog the machine.) You can also "mow" a pile of raked leaves, but this works best if you have a grass catcher attachment to contain all the ground-up debris.



*Photo courtesy of Norm Kosky*

Another recommended option for disposing of leaves is to compost them, as they are a good addition to your compost pile. You do not need to shred them, but it may help speed up the rate of decomposition. Since leaves are difficult to compost alone, you should add materials high in nitrogen, such as grass clippings.



If you have room to save some of your leaves, you can use these to mix along with your green materials next spring and summer. For more information on composting, there are many gardening books in the library that cover this subject. You can also find several links on composting on the WSU Waste Wise website: <http://www.wastewise.wsu.edu/compost.html>

*Photo Courtesy of Norm Kosky*

## Other Alternatives for Yard Waste Disposal



Not everyone has the ability or time to compost their leaves and other fall yard debris; for those people, there are other options available. If you have small branches to get rid of, you might think about renting, borrowing, or buying a chipper-shredder, which you can use to produce valuable mulch for your plants, trees and shrubs. You can also leave branches in a loose pile to provide habitat for birds and other wildlife; see how at <http://www.birdwatching.com/tips/brushpile.html> (Photo of wildlife habitat brush pile in U.K. at left; you can also do this with your branches and limbs.)

What are your options to safely get rid of your other excess yard waste in Island County?

### Camano:

You have two choices: you can take your yard waste to the Transfer Station on Camano, or haul it to Lenz Enterprises in Stanwood. The current cost of dropping off your yard waste at the transfer station is \$76 per ton, which is much less than the \$110 per ton charged for regular solid waste. The yard waste must be “clean”, meaning it can’t include plastic plant pots, wire fencing, plastic bags, rocks, etc – only what you had growing in your yard. Branches and other debris should be under 6 feet in length and 6” in diameter, which means you should not be bringing in logs, stumps, and other large woody debris.



*Photo of Camano Transfer Station.  
Courtesy of Judy Chapman.*

Remember to 'cover your load' to avoid the Uncovered Load Fees charged at transfer stations. The yard waste is taken to Lenz Enterprises, where it is turned into compost. Camano residents can also haul it directly to Lenz Enterprises on their way to I-5; Lenz is located at 5210 SR 532; their fees are posted on their website, <http://www.lenz-enterprises.com/index.php>

### **Whidbey:**

One alternative is to drop off your yard waste at Island County's transfer station on SR 20 south of Coupeville. The cost is \$76 per ton, same as on Camano. The yard waste must be "clean", meaning it can't include plastic plant pots, wire fencing, plastic bags, rocks, etc – only what you had growing in your yard. Remember to 'cover your load' to avoid the Uncovered Load Fees charged at transfer stations.

If you live in the City of Oak Harbor, you can have a 95 gallon yard waste roll cart delivered by contacting the city utilities office at 279-4530. From December 1<sup>st</sup> to February 28<sup>th</sup>, pickup is on the first week of the month on your regular pickup day, at a cost of \$6.50 every two months. From March 1<sup>st</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>, yard waste is picked up weekly on your regular pickup day, at a cost of \$19.44 every two months. You also have the option of buying pre-paid City yard waste bags for leaves, grass and small branches.



*Coupeville Transfer Station Photo Courtesy of Janet Hall*

These are \$3.50 each, and can be bought at City Hall, Safeway, Market Place Grocery Store and Albertsons. Another option in Oak Harbor (but available to everyone) is to take your green waste to Mailliard Landing Nursery. They accept clean brush and grass clippings (no dirt, rocks, etc) at \$10 per cubic yard, with no size limit. Sheet rock and clean construction debris can be dropped off for \$20 per cubic yard. Call 679-8544 for details.

Pre-paid punch cards are sold at the Langley City Hall to dispose of clean yard waste (grass, leaves and branches) at the Wastewater Treatment Plant at 999 Coles Road. The city requests that you separate grass and leaves from branches and other yard debris. The costs differ for residents and non-residents, but all must pay in advance because there is no cash handling at the treatment plant. Call the city for details at 221-4246. Compost is also available for pickup. It is free when loaded by the customer, or available for a nominal charge when loaded in your vehicle using a backhoe.

## Resources

“Options for Disposing of Leaves”, University of Minnesota Extension, Mungass, Robert J & Halbach, Thomas R., 2009, University of Minnesota.

“Three Bin Yard Waste Composter”, Seattle Tilth. <http://www.seattletilth.org/learn/resources-1/compost/woodwire3bin.pdf>

## Events

### **Making Sense of Solar**

Wednesday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, Camano Multipurpose Center, 141 N. East Camano Drive, Camano Island. 7:00 pm. Suzanne Frew, manager of residential programs at the Snohomish PUD, will provide detailed information on how the PUD "solar express" program will bring solar energy to your home and how with financial incentives and 30% Federal Tax credit you can create your own clean, green, renewable energy. Fourth Wednesday Informational Series, sponsored by WSU Island County Beach Watchers. For more info: Call 387-3443, ext 258, or visit [beachwatchers.wsu.edu/island](http://beachwatchers.wsu.edu/island).

### **Free Soil Building Workshop!**

Join WSU Extension and the Northwest Ag Business Center at the Greenbank Farm on Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, from 10am-2:30pm to learn more about adding composted manures to your fields. Knowledge of soil structure and fertility is important for any farm, but can be more challenging for small organic farms (certified or using organic practices) located on marginal soils. Information in this workshop will not be restricted to those working within organic standards, but will focus on more sustainable farming practices.

Craig Cogger, scientist/Extension specialist with WSU's Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, will address organic amendments, issues of food safety with manure applications, concerns about clopyralid and other synthetic pesticide residues, and C/N ratios and compost stability.

After a "networking lunch," David Ridle, with Skagit Farmer Supply's Rural Living and Youth Programs, and Ken Petry, local farmer, will demonstrate various methods for applying composted manures –via a tractor with appropriate implements, and a roto-tiller.

The workshop is funded by a mini-grant from the Western Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (WSARE) Professional Development Program. Registration is required so that adequate materials can be provided for all participants. For more information or to register for the workshop, contact the WSU Island County Extension Office at 321-5111, ext. 5558, or 240-5558, or [judyf@wsu.edu](mailto:judyf@wsu.edu) Lunch is available for \$5.



*This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at*

*[www.islandcountymrc.org](http://www.islandcountymrc.org)*

*The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>*

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