

# #7: Recycle

## RE-USE YOUR YARD WASTE TO SAVE MONEY AND ENRICH YOUR SOIL

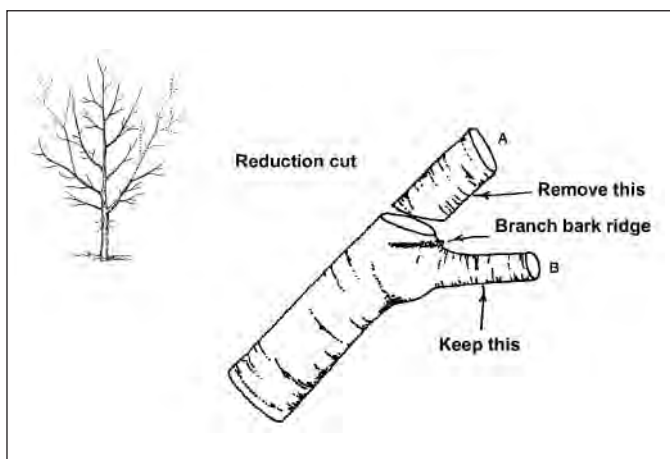
Landscape maintenance activities like mowing, pruning, and raking generate yard waste that you can compost or mulch, recycling valuable nutrients. It's easy to recycle yard waste.

### MOWING

Leave clippings on the lawn—they'll decompose, returning nutrients to the turf. Use a mulching mower blade to cut grass into smaller pieces, speeding decomposition. You can also use clippings as mulch or compost.

### PRUNING

Pruning is selectively removing parts of a plant to improve plant health, control growth, or enhance fruiting, flowering, or appearance. Prune shrubs and other small plants using one of three techniques: thinning, heading back, or hedging. Follow the steps below, and then shred the resulting cuttings to add to the compost pile or use as mulch. You can also toss the cuttings behind a shrub to decompose.



Proper pruning enhances plant health.

- **Keep it healthy.** Remove all dead, diseased, or injured branches.
- **Keep it clean.** If pruning a diseased plant, dip pruning shears and saws in alcohol to keep from spreading the problem.
- **Keep it uniform.** Remove branches that cross or touch each other and any that look out of place.
- **Keep it minor.** Hire an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture to prune trees taller than about 15 feet. Correct pruning makes trees more resistant to hurricane damage.

### CALLING THE PROFESSIONALS

If you are unsure about proper tree pruning techniques, consider hiring an arborist—a specialist in the care of trees—to prune your trees. Look for someone who is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture. Certification indicates that the arborist has been trained through continuing education administered by the ISA.

To find an ISA-certified arborist in your area, check out the International Society of Arboriculture Florida Chapter's Web site, <http://floridaisa.org>, and search by ZIP code.

Pruning trees can be a technical, detailed, and dangerous process. Learn more about it online at <http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>.



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### BASIC PRUNING STEPS

Use these simple steps as a guideline for every pruning job you tackle:

- Remove all dead, diseased, or injured branches.
- Dip pruning shears and saws in alcohol to prevent spreading diseases between plants.
- Remove branches that cross or touch each other and any that look out of place.
- If a shrub is too tall, heading and thinning may both be necessary. Don't use hedge shears, but cut each branch individually to different lengths with hand pruners. This maintains a neat informal shrub with a natural shape.

## REDUCE YOUR PRUNING LOAD

Keep pruning chores to a minimum:

- Select slow-growing plants
- Place plants far enough from walkways, driveways, or buildings to allow them to reach maturity without encountering obstructions that require hauling out the pruners.
- Forget the clipped, formal look. Soft, flowing, natural lines are attractive and easy to maintain.

## RAKING

Many new Floridians avoid having deciduous trees in their yards because they believe that fallen leaves require raking. But deciduous trees reduce energy costs by shading a house in summer and, after leaves fall, by allowing sunshine to heat a house in winter.

Rake up leaves and pine needles and use them as mulch or add them to the compost pile. Or permit leaves to remain under trees to form a self-mulching area. Leaves add nutrients to soil as they decompose. If aesthetics are an issue, plant shrubs under trees to avoid raking. The shrubs will benefit from decomposing plant litter and help to hold leaves in place so they won't clutter the landscape.

## COMPOSTING

A common misconception about plant care is that all plants require fertilizer. Plants do need nutrients, but they might not need added fertilizer. That is because as organic matter decomposes, nutrients are released into the soil in a form that plants can utilize.

A great way to supply some of these key nutrients to plants while recycling yard waste is by adding compost, which you can make from yard or kitchen waste. As compost decomposes in soil, it releases essential nutrients. Add generous amounts of composted material frequently to soil to help create the perfect medium for sustained plant health.

Adding compost to soil can:

- Improve soil structure, texture, and aeration.
- Increase the water-holding capacity of soil.
- Help loosen compacted soils.
- Promote soil fertility and stimulate root development.

- Create a favorable environment for microorganisms, earthworms, and insects that are nature's "soil builders."

Composting can be as simple as placing leaves, grass clippings, and small cuttings behind shrubs or in a hidden corner of the yard and letting nature take its course. Homemade or manufactured compost bins allow you to easily incorporate kitchen waste, such as vegetable and fruit scraps, eggshells, and coffee grounds. Numerous types of compost bins are commercially available, and many are attractive. Gardening magazines, catalogs, and garden centers are good sources for composting products. For more information about composting, visit <http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>.



Place your compost bin in a convenient location.

Follow these tips for successful composting:

- **Try using a bin.** They're not necessary, but they help keep piles neat, retain heat and moisture, and prevent complaints from neighbors. The minimum recommended size is 1 cubic yard (3 feet square by 3 feet high).
- **Decide when you want it.** Composting can take as little as four to six weeks or as long as one to two years, depending on the size and type of material in the pile and the amount of attention you give it.
- **Add water as you build the pile.** Proper moisture is necessary for microorganisms to decompose the material. Covering the pile retains moisture and prevents the decomposing material from getting too soggy when it rains. You should not be able to squeeze water from the material produced at the bottom of the pile.
- **Combine different materials in the pile,** such as grass clippings and leaves, to achieve the right proportions of carbon and nitrogen for effective composting.
- **Always bury kitchen waste** inside the pile to discourage pests and to prevent odor from rotting fruit and

vegetables. Never place meat, animal fat, or dairy products in a compost pile.

- **Turn or stir the pile with a pitchfork or shovel** on a weekly basis for faster composting. Stabbing the pile

with a length of pipe or rake handle will also help aerate and mix the material.

## WHAT TO COMPOST

Compost is both an easy way to reduce the amount of waste you send to the landfill and a cheap way to get nutrients for your garden. The key is balancing “green,” or nitrogen-rich, materials with “brown,” or carbon-rich, materials (plus some air and moisture). Here are some items you can compost. All of them will decompose faster when chopped up.

### GREEN

Grass clippings  
Weeds  
Fruit and vegetable scraps  
Eggshells  
Plant trimmings  
Farm animal manure

### BROWN

Fallen leaves  
Twigs and fallen branches  
Wood chips and sawdust  
Tea bags  
Coffee grounds and filters  
Paper towels  
Pine needles  
Dryer lint  
Cornstalks and corn cobs  
Shredded newspaper and cardboard

Never compost pet waste or animal fats like meat, grease, and cheese. They can create odor problems and attract pests.