

Yard Waste Recycling & Management

In a Nutshell

If you have a yard, you have yard waste. There are various practices that can make your lawncare routine more sustainable, including mowing grass with a mulching blade, composting yard waste, using compost for fertilizer, and collecting and storing rain water. The goal is to minimize the amount of lawn maintenance materials that are purchased and/or thrown away.

The “How To”

While residents can adopt these practices on their own, local governments have the opportunity to develop more formal programs. Ultimately both groups are most productive when their efforts are coordinated.

Residents

Tufts University's [Office of Sustainability](#) presents a user's guide, from the National Center for Appropriate Technology's [Sustainable Agriculture Information Service](#) program, on [sustainable practices for turf lawns](#).

Local Governments

St. Peters, Missouri within the St. Louis metropolitan area has received multiple national awards and recognition for their [Earth Centre program](#). Their website describes the benefits and reasons for both a municipality and a resident to use recycled organic materials. Like St. Peters, [Springfield, Missouri](#) also offers such services, including a landscaping retail center. Such services can also be found within the private sector.

Planning & Zoning

The main role for municipalities and local governments to play in sustainable yard maintenance and lawn waste management is to provide programming and services that encourages and/or facilitates such practices in your community. Programs such as the ones managed by [St. Peters](#) and [Springfield, Missouri](#) are excellent examples of city recycling programs. St. Peters manages their program inhouse, while Springfield contracts the service out. Examples of services that counties/cities can offer include:

- Processing brush, grass clippings, leaves and other organic waste into mulch and compost
- Curbside yard waste collection
- Yard waste recycling and collection drop-off point
- Public information campaigns
- Sustainable landscape maintenance classes and training
- Selling and/or donating mulch, compost, and topsoil to the community (produced from collected yard waste)
- Wood chipping and collecting unwanted tree limbs and branches
- Managing community drop-spots after major storms or high-winds to collect downed tree limbs

Dollars & Cents

There are too many economic benefits for sustainable landscaping and yard waste management to fully review here. The benefits range from reducing landfill use, to producing cleaner air, to reducing soil erosion. The [United States Botanical Garden](#), in a partnership with the American Society of Landscape Architects and the University of Texas - Austin, have produced a [report](#) which discusses several benefits to sustainable site management. The Missouri Botanical Garden produced a [guide for sustainable gardening](#) that explains in depth many benefits to sustainable gardening. One specific solution with proven benefits is a [comprehensive rainscaping design](#), which the Missouri Botanical Garden also reviews in detail.

Cost to Local Government

Certain programs, such as public information campaigns, require little extra funding from the community. New city/county services such as recycling facilities, retail centers, or collection points will cost to install. Other costs to consider is the collection of solid waste. Communities can choose to perform this service themselves or pay a private contractor to do it. Both [St. Peters](#) and [Springfield, Missouri](#) are excellent resources for cities looking to start recycling programs. The former does their recycling inhouse while the latter contracts out to local businesses.

Measuring Success

Strategies for Success

For municipalities and units of local government, a pro-active program may be the best method to encourage community participation. An example of this approach is to publicly recognize sustainable lawns within the community. An important part of any sustainability effort is not only awareness, but also educating the public. There is a learning curve. Local governments and community organizations, such as the Missouri Botanical Garden or local garden clubs, can help bridge that divide.

Quality Metrics

Working with existing waste haulers and landfill management professionals, a city or county can easily calculate the amount of yard waste recycled. If state law prohibits yard waste in landfills, tracking the tonnage collected through new programs is a meaningful figure. Public information resources can be tracked by the amount of people engaged, and/or the amount of people who know about the program. Attendance in trainings and classes is a good measurement of interest and participation. Increasing attendance at "green home" tours shows growing interest. Ultimately many of the metrics for this tool can be simple. When a new program or service is launched, simply identify what your goal is (i.e reduced store-bought mulch) and then track how successful the program is.

Discover More

The Missouri Botanical Gardens offers a wealth of [resources for sustainability and natural resources conservation](#). In St. Louis, there is an annual [sustainable backyard tour](#).