



BURNING YARD WASTE IS A WAY OF THE PAST

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Due to increasing concerns over air pollution in Nevada and Placer Counties, gardeners are exploring alternatives to burning their leaves, shrub and tree trimmings.

Chipping yard prunings to be used in either compost or as mulch is a sustainable alternative to burning because you are diverting a large amount of organic material from ever-diminishing landfills, helping to improve the air quality that you and your neighbor breathe and also enhancing the health and productivity of your garden.

The benefits of using compost and mulch in your garden are many:

- Compost when worked into the soil improves its structure by increasing drainage and saving water
- Compost creates a healthy soil micro-environment that provides organic material for microorganisms to feed on thus releasing important nutrients for your plants
- Mulches, when spread over a soil surface, help to suppress weeds
- Mulching helps in modifying extreme fluctuations in soil temperature
- Mulching controls erosion
- Mulching solves the problem of a muddy garden pathway
- Mulches help keep fallen fruit off the soil so it is less likely to bruise and rot

Composting is EASY

There is a misconception that burning is a less labor intensive and convenient way to deal with yard waste, but with the right equipment and information, composting and mulching can be easy, effective, and have nothing but positive effects on the environment. A small garden shredder can be used to shred annuals, pine needles, twigs, branches, and leaves from ornamental trees and shrubs.

For larger tree branches or brush piles, both Placer and Nevada Counties offer chipping programs where they will go to the homes of county residents and chip yard waste piles for a small fee (Placer) or donation (Nevada).

Check the websites of:

- The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County Chipping Program, www.firesafecouncilnevco.com
- The CDF/Placer County Fire Hazard Mitigation Program, www.placerfsa.org

When chipping yard waste to be used as "brown materials" in your compost pile, be sure to break it down to 1/2 to 1-1/2 inches. Woody material takes longer to decay, so the smaller the pieces are the faster they will break down in your compost pile. Leaves can be shredded with a lawn mower and left in place. They will decompose quickly and add valuable nitrogen and organic matter to the soil.

Chippings can also be used as a mulch layer around trees, shrubs and your other plants. For best appearance, materials for mulch should be 1 to 2 inches long and no more than an inch thick. Be sure to keep mulches 2 to 4 inches away from trunks of trees and shrubs. Mulches can be applied year round but should maintain the appropriate thickness of 2 to 4 inches. Don't forget that if you have a significant amount of chippings, feel free to share with your neighbor and help him or her improve their compost pile and garden. It's so much nicer than a back yard full of smoke.

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