

## Leaves and Our Lakes

Nature provides our lakes and streams with more nutrients – in the form of decaying leaves – than they can process every fall. Excess nutrients lead to algae growth during warmer months and, in extreme cases, cause the water to become green and foul smelling. Prior to modern development, the landscape slowly absorbed most of these extra nutrients. Today, the storm sewer system collects runoff during rainstorms and quickly carries leaves and anything else found on city streets, sidewalks, and roofs to the nearest storm drain and waterbody. Think of it as experiencing Thanksgiving meals on a regular basis. Your body does not require that much food and cannot use it in a way that is good for you. The same is true of our lakes.

Our lakes need your help! Many residents remove leaves and grass clippings from their yards and apply fertilizers. Instead of fertilizing your lawn, consider using your lawn mower to mulch leaves and grass clippings to provide the extra nutrients your grass needs. If you have more leaves than you can mulch into your grass this fall, consider composting them by creating a pile and turning them with a shovel or pitch fork periodically. The more you turn the compost, the quicker it becomes a useful source of nutrients for your gardens. Lastly, some Rice Creek Watershed District cities offer yard waste pick-up and compost the material for you. Contact your city directly to learn more. These steps will protect nearby lakes and streams as well as save you time and money.

Remember for every five bags of leaves you compost or mulch into your lawn, you are keeping up to 500 pounds of algae from growing in your favorite swimming spot of fishing hole. In this case, a little effort goes a long way.