

# Make the most of the three R's on your property

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As fall approaches, routine yard maintenance is usually on every homeowner's to-do list. This fall, consider the environmentally friendly viewpoint of lawn care and practice the three R's – **reduce, reuse** and **recycle**.

There should be no such thing as “yard waste” since all leaves, yard trimmings and grass can be reduced, reused or recycled. Leaving leaves and branches piled by the street for days awaiting collection can negatively affect our water quality as stormwater washes nutrients from these piles into storm sewers and right into our lakes and rivers.

Get more satisfaction out of routine lawn care by using the following suggestions to practice the three R's on your property.

*Use organic mulches* – **recycle** leaves, wood chips, grass clippings and other yard trimmings as mulch to retain soil moisture, reduce weed growth, moderate daily and seasonal soil temperatures, and reduce soil erosion.

*Plant groundcovers* – **reduce** impractical lawn areas such as steep slopes, shady areas, or low spots while keeping tree roots moist and cool by planting groundcovers. Less lawn means fewer grass clippings and less fertilizer and pesticide use.

*Direct downspouts into planting beds or lawns* – **reduce** runoff from downspouts directed onto paved surfaces, which can contribute to water pollution, by redirecting water to your yard or into a planting bed or rain garden.

*Collect and store rainwater* – **reduce** the amount of stormwater flowing into Muskoka's lakes and rivers and **reuse** it during dry periods.

*Try natural landscaping* – naturalize at least a portion of your yard to **reduce** maintenance, grass clippings, and pesticide and fertilizer use. Take the opportunity to enjoy attractive native vegetation while your property contributes to a healthier watershed.

*Landscape the border of your yard* – perimeter plantings provide a convenient place to **recycle** tree trimmings, leaves and garden debris. Accelerate decomposition by cutting twigs and other materials into smaller pieces.

*Select plants for proper size and vigor* – **reduce** trimmings by selecting dwarf varieties and always plan for the mature height of trees and shrubs before planting. Pest-resistant varieties **reduce** both chemical use and dead wood from diseased plants. Take the climate, soil, light conditions and topography of your yard into account when choosing plants.

*Put downed branches to good use* – burned the branches if you have a fireplace and **recycle** the ashes in the compost. Otherwise, **reuse** branches as plant stakes or as vegetable or vine supports.

*Establish a holding area for brush* – use landscaping or a fence to visually screen an area that holds tree and shrub trimmings until they are cut up and **recycled** in your yard.



*Manage lawn areas wisely* – **recycle** nutrients by leaving clippings on the lawn where they belong. If clippings build up and must be collected, **reuse** them as mulch or compost. Taking proper care of your lawn keeps it growing vigorously, which reduces disease and pesticide use.

*Fertilize conservatively and carefully* – test your soil and **reduce** the use of fertilizers to avoid the excessive plant growth that contributes to potential yard waste. Clean up spilled fertilizer from paved surfaces and **reuse** it on your lawn to prevent it from being carried into Muskoka's lakes and rivers.

*Use leaves as a resource* – small amounts of leaves, when shredded with a lawn mower, can be **recycled** as an organic nutrient source if left on your lawn. This **reduces** the amount of raking. Leaves can also be used to mulch perimeter plantings or as an ingredient in compost.

*Leave space in flowerbeds or gardens to trench compost* – **recycle** nutrients back into the soil by digging a small trench to bury and compost pulled weeds and garden or kitchen wastes. This composted organic matter improves the soil for next year's plantings and **reduces** the need for fertilizer.

The key is to lessen the waste problem in some way by first rethinking how you do things, and then to reduce, reuse and recycle around your yard.

