

COMPOSTING AND OTHER ORGANIC WASTE STRATEGIES

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Current legislative activity at the Federal, State and Local level has prompted interest in management of the significant quantities of organic residue produced on the golf course. Disposal methods utilized in the past have been identified as "environmentally unfriendly" due to landfill overflow and potential contamination from fertilizers and pesticides present in grass clippings. "Environmentally friendly" methods of managing organic waste range from judicious recycling to composting.

Grass clippings represent the largest single organic residue generation in turfgrass management. Conservative estimates of clippings produced range from 30 pounds/1000 ft²/growing month for a buffalograss lawn to 125 pounds/1000 ft²/growing month for a bentgrass green. Depending on location, trees may also contribute a significant portion of residue via leaves, twigs, small branches, fruit and seeds. Grass clippings can be recycled back to the turf in many situations and represent a significant return of nutrients in the process. When not recycled immediately, clippings can be composted. The benefits of compost have been recognized for years in the home garden. Only recently has the potential for use of compost in turf management been investigated. See addresses at the end of this article for sources of information on composting.

Other methods of limiting organic residue accumulation involve subtle change in cultural practices. A slight increase in mowing height or decrease in nitrogen application will result in less organic residue. Proper pruning will promote strong, healthy tree growth, while limiting production of weak branch production and, subsequently, reduce woody debris production. The use of plant growth regulators on turf and trees will reduce plant production. Other cultural practices which promote healthy trees and turf may ultimately decrease turnover of organic materials.

A significant obstacle in managing organic residue is the perception of grass and tree clippings as a "waste" to be disposed of. These residues should be considered a "resource" to be utilized for improvement of the golf course or other landscape settings. Remember, "a waste is a terrible thing to mind."

Compost information sources:

National Composting Program
The United States Conference of
Mayors
1620 Eye Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 293-7330

The Composting Council
114 South Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-2401

Cornell Waste Management Institute
425 Hollister Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-3501
(607) 255-1187

In-Vessel Composting Equipment:

Auspurger Engineering, Inc.
2519 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016
(602) 956-1942

Compost Technologies, Inc.
1218 N 123rd St
Omaha, NE 68154
(800) 492-2770