

## Open Burning FAQ's



**Q: Does the ordinance apply to everyone?**

A: The Open Burning Ordinance applies to all areas of McHenry County. However, some municipalities have more restrictions for open burning than the County Ordinance. Residents of municipalities should check with their city regarding additional local restrictions.

**Q: Does the Open Burning Ordinance allow the burning of garbage, rubbish or trash?**

A: Burning of garbage, rubbish or trash is prohibited throughout all of McHenry County.



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**Q: What is the definition of garbage, rubbish or trash?**

A: Garbage, rubbish and trash encompasses a variety of waste including, but not limited to, paper goods, cardboard, food waste, animal waste, household discards such as furniture, clothing, mattresses, etc., construction debris, appliances, and similar items. Questions regarding what constitutes a waste may be directed to the McHenry County Department of Health.

**Q: What are some of the restrictions included in the Ordinance?**

A: All landscape waste must be generated onsite. No burning may take place within 100 feet of a habitable structure or within 50 feet of a non-habitable structure. Supervised burning of dry landscape waste may be conducted between dawn and dusk on Saturday or Sunday during the months of April, May, October and November. Water or a fire control source is required; winds must be less than 10 mph and smoke may not create a visibility hazard.

**Q: Can I still burn landscape waste if I live on a small lot?**

A: It depends on whether the minimum setback requirements can be met. A minimum 100 foot setback to all habitable structures and a minimum 50 foot setback to all non-habitable structures is required.

**Q: Do the open burning setback requirements apply to domestic fireplaces, external fireplaces or grills, or self-contained outdoor wood-burning devices?**

A: No. Provided these units are operated in accordance with the



manufacturer's instructions and are not used to dispose of leaves, grass, shrubbery clippings, cuttings, garbage, rubbish or trash.

**Q: What if the only area of my yard greater than 100' from any habitable structure or 50' from any non-habitable structure is located in the road right-of-way?**

A: Open burning is not permitted on public or private roads, in the road right-of-way, alleys, sidewalks or easements and burning within the right-of-way could create a visibility hazard for motorists.

**Q: Are campfires allowed?**

A: YES. The Ordinance allows for recreational fires provided they are no larger than 3'x 3'x 3' and exclude leaves, grass or shrubbery clippings or cuttings.

**Q: Are bonfires allowed?**

A: YES. The Ordinance allows for ceremonial fires (bonfire) provided they exclude leaves, grass or shrubbery clippings or cuttings. In addition, you must notify your local fire protection district and obtain a permit from the McHenry County Department of Health prior to the event.

**Q: Is burning allowed for habitat restoration?**

A: YES. Consistent with existing state law, the Ordinance allows for prescribed open burning for ecological restoration, natural landscape management, reclamation and/or firefighter training. A [permit from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency](#) (IEPA) is required.



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**Q: What are my options if my burning area does not meet the minimum setback requirements?**

A: Please visit the Department's webpage at [www.mcdh.info](http://www.mcdh.info) or call us at (815) 334-4585 for tips on composting, mulching, native landscaping or other natural environmentally safe alternatives to open burning. You may also contact your waste hauler, who is required to offer landscape waste pick up for their customers. Please note the waste hauler may charge an additional fee for this service.

**Q: Who should I contact if I have a concern of non-compliant burning in my neighborhood?**

A: Multiple agencies may respond to burning complaints. The McHenry County Department of Health, local law enforcement agencies (municipal police, sheriff's department), fire departments and fire protection districts may enforce the Ordinance. If you reside in a city with a local Ordinance, you should contact the city. Agencies who respond to complaints of open burning of landscape waste are responsible for a variety of issues. Agency response will be prioritized according to protocol established by each agency. If you are reporting a fire that is life threatening or is a fire safety issue, CALL 911.

**Q: Where can I get more information regarding the Open Burning Ordinance?**

A: Visit the McHenry County Department of Health's web page at [www.mcdh.info](http://www.mcdh.info) or contact the Department at (815) 334-4585.

## Alternatives to Open Burning

### Native Landscape



#### Designs by Nature

Native landscaping absorbs rainfall and reduces the runoff of nutrients and chemicals and provides a natural habitat for butterflies and birds.

Natural landscaping will reduce the need for yard waste disposal and rely less on turf and more on woodland and natural plantings.



Selecting plants that are native to our area will provide the following benefits:

- Reduce pesticide use
- Reduces use of power equipment
- Enhances wildlife habitat
- Less upkeep and watering

A more natural landscaping requires less maintenance than a conventional lawn, not to mention the reduction of chemical and pesticide use.

Native plants have learned to adapt to their environment and climate in order to survive with little human assistance. It also benefits local wildlife.

**Additional Information on native landscaping may be found at:**

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

[Natural Landscaping List by State](#)

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

[Listing of Illinois Native Plants](#)

**Composting**

# HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic materials using aerobic bacteria. By composting, you return organic matter to the soil in a usable form. The composting process reduces material volume by 70-80%. Organic material in the soil improves plant growth by:

- Enhancing soil texture
- Adding nutrients back into the soil
- Increasing the soil's ability to retain water and nutrients
- Improving soil structure by the addition of organic matter
- Loosening heavy soils, allowing better root penetration



- Reducing the need for fertilizers

Mixing green and brown plant materials together is the basic rule of composting. Green materials (i.e. grass clippings) supply nitrogen. Brown materials (i.e. dead leaves) are high in carbon. Moisture and air are also needed for the composting process.

Construct your compost pile directly on the soil to allow contact with microorganisms. A partly shaded location works best; too much sun will dry out the pile. Larger piles will retain more heat and decompose faster.

As the yard materials go through the composting process, there is an increase in temperature within the compost pile. High temperatures kill most disease pathogens that are present. Weed seeds and pesticides are destroyed as well because of the high temperatures.

After a few weeks, the pile will be ready to turn. Turning and mixing the pile with a pitch fork or shovel provides the oxygen necessary for decomposition and compensates for excess moisture.

Materials that may be acidic when added to a compost pile will become almost neutral in pH. Compost acts as a buffer against high or low pH when added to soil that is acidic or alkaline.

A compost pile started in late spring can be ready for use in the fall. Start another pile in autumn for use in the spring.





Compost bins can be useful to enclose and manage your compost pile. Bins can be built from wood, cinder blocks, chicken wire, or snow fencing. The following are links to help you get started:

## **University of Illinois Extension**

[Home Composting](#)

## **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

[Additional Composting Information](#)

## **Mulching**



Use your mower to shred leaves into bits which, like grass clippings, will be washed down into the soil between the grass blades during the next rain. Leaves provide small amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus,



potassium and micro-nutrients to the lawn. Mulched leaves contribute to soil health.

Mow on a frequent basis as the leaves fall. You may have to mow twice to chop the leaves into small enough pieces. Leaves only need to be collected off the lawn if the chopped leaf layer is so thick that it blocks out the sun.

Use the bag attachment on your mower to collect the leaves and use them for mulch around trees, shrubs or wooded areas. Shredded leaves will not cause thatch or weeds in your lawn. Leaves applied 4 inches deep between rows make an excellent pathway. Also, tilling or digging leaves into vegetable and annual flower beds will improve the soil's quality. Shredding leaves first will make tilling easier and the leaves will decompose faster.

Chopping up grass and leaves has benefits for your yard:

- Improves the soil by adding nutrients & organic content
- Encourages earthworm activity
- Moderates soil temperatures
- Conserves moisture
- Reduces weeds
- Reduces soil erosion

A heavily wooded area on your property is a good location for extra leaves. Be sure the leaves are chopped first. Too thick of a leaf layer may smother woodland plants.

## Other Alternatives - Removing Landscape Waste



### Local Waste Haulers

Check with your local waste hauler. Waste haulers who are licensed in McHenry County and provide regular residential waste pickup are required to offer the service of picking up landscape waste. An additional fee may be charged for the service. [See a list of municipal solid waste haulers who are licensed in McHenry County.](#)

Some waste haulers offer additional services for landscape waste/removal. Options may include working cooperatively with



neighbors and subdivision associations to contract with a local landscape waste hauler to pick up both containerized and non-containerized leaves from the curbside. Another option it to coordinate roll-off containers that would be shared by multiple properties by the waste hauler for appropriate disposal.

## Yard Waste Recycling Company

Homeowners also have the option of dropping off their yard waste at a local facility that composts yard waste into organic material for beneficial re-use.

### **Thelen Sand and Gravel Compost Facility**

#### **[Thelen Organics Flyer](#)**

815-675-6613

**[www.thelensg.com](http://www.thelensg.com)**

### **Petersen Pit Landscape Waste Transfer Station**

815-675-6613

### **Garden Prairie Organics**

815-597-1318

**[www.gpocompost.com](http://www.gpocompost.com)**

## Agricultural Application

Local farmers may use leaves from landscape waste as part of their crop fertilization. Leaves and grass clipping can be applied to crops to provide additional organic matter and nutrients. The increased



organic matter in the soil helps improve the condition of poorly drained soils.

## **Reduce, Reduce, Reduce**

Reduce the volume of landscape waste by:

- Chipping up twigs and branches and using the wood chips in your landscaping.
- Using a mulching lawn mower and bag the leaves to use in your garden between rows or for pathways.
- In a cooperative effort with your neighbors, rent a wood chipper for a day!

## **Landscape / Lawn Service Companies**

Check with local landscape companies. Landscape companies may pick-up your landscape waste as part of their landscape maintenance services. The landscape waste would be taken to a commercial composting site for processing and beneficial reuse and offer products such as wood chips, wood mulch or firewood for sale to customers.