

## CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED NOTES

From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy  
October 18, 2009



Part of responsible watershed stewardship is to keep leaves and other yard waste away from storm drains near your home; everything that goes down a storm drain ends up in a lake, stream, or wetland.

Photo courtesy of Austin Marques - K.I.C.K.

### **Save Your Gold, Save Your Green**

**By John Jablonski III**

Leaves of gold and grass clippings of green should be treated as valuable resources. How do you manage your gold and your green?

Each fall, Chautauqua Watershed property owners repeat the cycle of managing the leaves that drop from trees onto their yards. What you do with these leaves can either benefit or harm your yard's environment – as well as that of the lake or other waterway downhill from your property. Why? Leaves contain significant concentrations of phosphorus and other plant nutrients. One way of making those leaves benefit your own yard is to use a mulching mower to mulch the leaves right into your turf. Mow up the leaves frequently, before rain and snow compress them into your lawn. By mulching them into fine particles, the nutrients in the leaves will be released by decomposition back into the ground to nourish the trees. Mulching leaves into your lawn will not hurt your grass. Instead, the nutrients will be released and reused by the grass.

The same is true for your grass clippings. Grass clippings are especially high in nitrogen compounds; removing them from your lawn robs the soil and the roots of these important nutrients. Bagging grass clippings can remove as much nitrogen as is applied in one or more fertilizer applications. Why pay for additional fertilizers to replace your lawn's natural (free) nitrogen cycle?

If you cannot mulch all of the leaves into your lawn, collect them and compost them to improve your garden soil. Compost is a wonderful resource for increasing soil's fertility, its moisture-holding and infiltration capacity, and its attractiveness to beneficial soil organisms such as earthworms.

Never dump your leaves, tree branches or garden debris over stream banks, into waterways or onto flood plains, where such materials will be swept away by storm waters into Chautauqua Lake or other bodies of water and where their nutrients will help fuel nuisance plant growth and accelerate the filling of the lake with sediments.

Also avoid burning leaves, as it causes not only air pollution that adversely affects human health but also water pollution as the nutrients in the leaves are released in the atmosphere and then fall back to earth with precipitation to over-fertilize our lakes, streams and oceans. Much of the excess phosphorus and nitrogen compounds falling on our watersheds and polluting our waterways comes from air pollution. Burning leaves contributes to this problem.

If you live in a village or city area and choose to collect your leaves for municipal pick-up, please be aware that leaves left in the street will wash into storm drains, clogging culverts and delivering nutrients downstream. You probably don't realize it, but you live on "waterfront property." In fact, most everyone in Chautauqua County lives on a lake or stream when it comes to storm water runoff. That's because the distance between your yard and the water's edge is as close as the nearest storm drain or ditch. Please keep leaf piles up on the edge of your lawn, out of the street and out of roadside ditches. And please remember – never rake or dump your leaves into the lake or any waterway.

For more information on yard waste composting, yard care and lake and watershed management, please visit the following websites: <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/compostbrochure.pdf>, and the Chautauqua Cornell Cooperative Extension watershed stewardship website developed under contract with the Conservancy and the Chautauqua Lake Management Commission at <http://chautauquacce.shutterfly.com/watershed>. The City of Jamestown and Chautauqua Institution run yard waste composting operations. Jamestown's Fluvanna Avenue yard waste drop-off site is open to city residents on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM through November 21<sup>th</sup>. City of Jamestown residents may call 661-1660 for more information.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local, not-for-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization with the mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its annual membership campaign is underway. For more information or to support these efforts call 664-2166 or go to [chautauquawatershed.org](http://chautauquawatershed.org).