



# Gardens and Gutters

## A Central New Yorker's Guide to Managing Stormwater Runoff

### *Falling for Free Fertilizer*

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Autumn in Central New York is a beautiful season! Clear blue skies, crisp temperatures and vibrantly colored trees help ease the transition from the bright warmth of summer to the dark cold of winter. Unfortunately, all that treetop beauty can come back to haunt us this winter and spring if we don't properly address those falling leaves now.

Fallen leaves carry 50 to 80 percent of the nutrients a tree extracts from the soil and air, including carbon, potassium, and phosphorus. So why not take advantage of them as a natural, free source of nutrients for your lawn and stop paying for chemical fertilizers that your lawn probably doesn't need? Generally, supplemental phosphorus is only needed when establishing a new lawn or when indicated by a soil test. When phosphorus fertilizer is applied to lawns that don't need it, it washes off and can cause water pollution.

Mulching leaves with your lawn mower and leaving the pieces in place to decompose returns natural phosphorus to your lawn along with important organic matter that can improve soil condition.

Applying a two-to three-inch layer of leaves over a garden plot provides several benefits. Leaves hold down weed growth, add organic matter, and protect garden soil from compaction caused by rainfall.

If you find that you simply have too many leaves to mow into your lawn or spread on planting beds, try composting them for use next spring. Rake your leaves into a compost pile. Maintain air circulation in the pile by not compressing the leaves. Next spring, the leaves on the outside of the pile

will be largely in tact, but the leaves at the center of the pile will be fairly decomposed and ready to be incorporated into your garden soil.

If leaves cannot be disposed of on your property due to space limitations, check with your municipality to find out if a leaf collection service is available. Always follow curbside pick up schedules for your neighborhood. Some municipalities require that you bag leaves in paper for pick up, and others have placement requirements for leaf piles. Either way, leaves should never be placed in the storm drain, gutter, or street. Under these conditions, loose leaves will blow, flow, and clog storm water catch basins. Any leaves that make their way to local lakes and streams will release nutrients that contribute to the accelerated growth of algae, and negatively impact fish and other aquatic wildlife and habitat. More than 100 waterbodies in the state cannot be used for drinking, fishing or swimming because they contain too much phosphorus.



## Now is the Time to Button Up for Winter

### *Ice Problems? Go Pervious!*

Replacing your walkway or driveway with river stone, pervious pavers or other porous material will allow water to soak into the ground instead of becoming runoff.

Permeable interlocking concrete pavers separated by joints, pervious concrete, and porous asphalt have many advantages during the winter months when compared to conventional pavements.

- Snow melts faster on pervious pavements than on conventional pavements.
- Pervious pavements immediately drain the melted snow, reducing the risk of ice formation and hazards.
- Permeable interlocking concrete and porous asphalt are resistant to freeze-thaw cycles and require smaller amounts of de-icing materials.
- Pervious surfaces help reduce polluted stormwater runoff and erosion.

### Winter Rain Garden Protection

Even though your plants are dormant throughout the winter months, avoid shoveling snow onto your established rain garden. When the snow melts in the spring, the excess water can saturate the soil and harm your plants. Normal snow accumulation won't create a problem, but when shoveling your driveway or walkway, place the snow on the uphill side of the rain garden. The garden will absorb the excess runoff as the snow melts in the spring.



### Winter Rain Barrel Storage

Winter is several weeks away, but now is the time to prepare your rain barrel for winter storage. If you have the space, unhook the rain barrel from the downspout and store it in a garage or shed. If space isn't available, you can leave the rain barrel outdoors during the winter if you prepare it for the elements.

First, completely drain the rain barrel to avoid freezing or cracking. Then remove the spigots, screen, and hose and store them in a place where you can find them easily in the spring. You may also want to rinse out the rain barrel in order to remove any sediment. If you are storing the rain barrel outside, turn it upside down to keep out the rain, ice and snow. If possible, weight it down or secure it to keep it from blowing away. After you've prepped the rain barrel for winter storage, consider redirecting the downspout so that melting snow and ice flows away from the foundation of your home. Attach another piece of downspout if necessary.

## Leaf Mold: Super Food for Your Garden

Leaves are a valuable natural resource. Rather than regard them as a nuisance, be grateful that the trees on your property drop a new supply every fall. It takes very little effort on your part to recycle them into a wonderful soil conditioner -- leaf mold -- for the yard and garden. Unlike compost, leaf mold is only partially decomposed, leaving bits and pieces of the leaves visible in the finished product. Unlike compost, leaf mold is derived only from leaves.

You can make leaf mold the same way nature creates it on the forest floor. Just pile up moist leaves and wait for them to decompose. If you want to speed up the process, you can shred the leaves into smaller pieces before piling them up. Enclose the pile, if you wish, with snow fencing, chicken wire, or something similar to improve its appearance. Make sure the container allows air to circulate, because oxygen fuels the decomposition process. Over the winter, the pile will shrink as decay reduces the volume of leaves -- a sign that the process is well under way.

Spread leaf mold on top of bare soil as an organic mulch. It keeps the soil from being compacted by hard rains and drying sunshine. It helps the soil retain moisture by decreasing evaporation, absorbing rain, and reducing wasteful runoff. Leaf mold gradually breaks down in the heat of summer, so renew the mulch layer whenever it becomes thin. Leaves are a valuable natural resource.

Leaf mold helps build healthy soil in several ways. When mixed into poor soil, it improves its texture. The coarse organic material creates air spaces in the soil, making it easier for roots to penetrate. Leaf mold also improves the soil's ability to absorb moisture and keep it available longer for plant roots. As the leaves continue to decompose, they improve the soil's fertility by creating a population of active microbes. Leaves are a favorite food of earthworms, which convert the leaves into nutrient-rich castings that are distributed throughout the soil. The layer can be thinner in shaded areas

where weeds are less bothersome. Leaf mold should not be spread deeper than 3 or 4 inches over tree roots.

### What You Need:

- Chicken wire
- Tall stakes
- Sledge hammer
- Leaf rack
- Mulching mower
- Compost fork
- Wheelbarrow or garden cart

### Instructions

1. **Set up a wire cylinder or similar container** to hold the accumulated leaves you'll be collecting. This will also help keep the wind from blowing the leaves around. If necessary, add stakes for stability.
2. **The smaller the pieces of organic material**, the faster they decompose. Shred leaves by mowing the lawn where they lie with a mulching mower, then rake them up. Or rake the leaves into a pile and mow over it.
3. **Load the shredded leaves into the cylinder.** Those leaves that are damp will decompose faster. Don't compress the leaves in the container because good airflow promotes decomposition.
4. **When spring comes around**, the leaves in the center of the pile will be fairly decomposed and those on the outside less so. As you transfer the leaves to a wheelbarrow or cart, be sure to mix the various layers before you spread them.

*Adapted from  
Better Homes  
and Gardens,  
"Preparing Your  
Garden for Winter"*



## CNY Stormwater Coalition

Formalized in 2011, the CNY Stormwater Coalition provides a regional approach to stormwater management and water resource protection. The Coalition is made up of 30 local governments and the NYS Fairgrounds. Each member operates a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). Through the Coalition, members are working together to meet regulatory requirements while improving water quality.

### CNY STORMWATER COALITION

Camillus Town	Baldwinsville Village
Cicero Town	Camillus Village
Clay Town	Central Square Village
DeWitt Town	East Syracuse Village
Geddes Town	Fayetteville Village
Hastings Town	Liverpool Village
LaFayette Town	Manlius Village
Lysander Town	Marcellus Village
Manlius Town	Minoa Village
Marcellus Town	North Syracuse Village
Onondaga Town	Phoenix Village
Pompey Town	Solvay Village
Salina Town	Syracuse City
Sullivan Town	Onondaga County
Van Buren Town	NYS Fairgrounds

### You're invited to attend the next CNY Stormwater Coalition Meeting

The CNY Stormwater Coalition meets quarterly throughout the year. Meetings are held on Tuesday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:00 at various municipal buildings around the region. All meetings are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2019. The location will be posted on the CNY Stormwater website at [www.cnyrpdb.org/stormwater](http://www.cnyrpdb.org/stormwater)



The CNY Stormwater Coalition is staffed and coordinated by the Central New York Regional Planning & Development Board. For more information, visit the CNY Stormwater Website at [www.cnyrpdb.org/stormwater](http://www.cnyrpdb.org/stormwater).



Central New York Regional Planning & Development Board

### Presentation: Herbs in Colonial Times

**Saturday, October 19, 2019, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM**

The Master Gardeners of Onondaga County will be delivering a presentation on Herbs in Colonial Times. This presentation is on Saturday, October 19th from 10:00am to 11:00am at the Northern Onondaga Public Library in Cicero.

This presentation is free and open to the public. Please contact the Northern Onondaga Public Library in Cicero at (315) 699-2032 to register.

### Illicit Discharges

Illicit discharges are generally any discharges into a storm drain system that are not composed entirely of stormwater. Illicit discharges are a problem because, unlike wastewater which flows to a wastewater treatment plant, stormwater generally flows to waterways without any additional treatment. Illicit discharges often include pathogens, nutrients, and various toxic pollutants.

A *Stormwater Pollution Hotline* has been established for reporting illicit discharges to surface water collection systems within regulated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) in Onondaga County.

If you suspect that someone has illicitly discharged contaminants such as chemicals, construction materials, paint, or petroleum products to a storm sewer or roadway, please contact the Onondaga County Stormwater Pollution Hotline at **315-435-3157**. The hotline is manned 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

### HAPPY NEW YEAR!

October 1 is the first day of the water year. Unlike the calendar year, the water year begins and ends during the driest season when groundwater aquifers are largely drawn down due to irrigation, evapotranspiration and decreased precipitation during the last and hottest months of summer. The Water New Year marks the start of aquifer recharge season which reaches its peak when the winter snow pack melts and more frequent rain events return again in the spring.

