

## Options for Managing Yard Waste

### Three Rs are Good Business

Landscape trimmings and other compostable organic materials comprise more than 40 percent of California's solid waste stream. Most (up to 60 percent) of the green waste from urban landscapes comes from the professional landscape industry. Consequently, landscape contractors and site managers are taking a larger role in helping to meet their community's waste reduction goals.

A good rule of business is to practice the three Rs: **reduce** yard waste generation, **reuse** trimmings and prunings on site, and **recycle** organic products (compost and mulch) back into the landscape. By following the suggestions below, you can cut the waste generated through your landscaping practices and save time and money.

### First Step: Reduce Waste Generation

Use resource-efficient landscape maintenance practices to minimize unneeded plant growth and the generation of green waste. You can save money (hauling and disposal cost), time (labor cost), and expenses (excess water and fertilizer cost) by using the following practices:

- **Controlled Irrigation**  
Water just enough to maintain plant functions and appearance. Schedule frequency and length of watering based on weather and plant requirement data. Water is the great growth regulator. Apply only what plants actually require. This will limit excessive plant growth and reduce waste.
- **Precise Fertilization Usage**  
Apply precise amounts of necessary plant nutrients based on soil testing and nutritional needs of the plants. Avoid fast-acting nitrogen sources that produce bursts of excessive growth. Since most woody plants do not require fertilizer for normal growth, eliminating fertilizer applications will minimize the need for pruning, thus reducing green waste.
- **Grasscycling**  
Grasscycling is the natural practice of mowing without a bag and leaving the clippings on the turf.



Grasscycling returns valuable, high-quality nutrients and organic matter to the soil. Using mulching mowers leaves small chopped-up clippings on the grass. As these decompose, the additional organic matter will reduce fertilizer and watering requirements.

- **Selective Pruning**  
Use techniques that result in natural growth patterns and healthy plants. Haphazard pruning or shearing plants into unnatural geometric or formal shapes often results in excessive new growth of weak and disease-prone offshoots. Woody plants should develop to their natural form—prune only to remove dead or diseased branches, leaves, and flowers.

### On-Site Management of Trimmings

On-site management (or reuse) of yard trimmings is the second option. Landscape contractors and site managers should consider doing their own mulching or composting, especially if an appropriate site is available. You can save money two ways: by avoiding landfill tipping fees, and by reducing or eliminating purchase of materials for your jobs. Here are some points to consider:

- **Mulching**  
Using a chipper or shredder, you can mulch prunings and trimmings from woody shrubs and trees at the job site. You can apply the resulting mulch to bare areas or planting beds in the landscape.  
  
Mulch has many practical applications. As a ground cover in planting beds, it will insulate plant roots, control weeds, and slow evaporation losses. Used on bare areas in the landscape, it also minimizes erosion, reduces dust and mud problems, and suppresses the spread of brush fires to hillside home sites.

- ***On-Site Composting***

Clippings and trimmings from lawns, trees, and shrubs from large landscape sites can become feedstock for on-site composting operations. The resulting compost can be recycled back to your landscape job sites.

As a soil amendment, compost can transform poor soils into a fertile growth medium that supports healthy disease- and pest-resistant plants. Compost improves soil texture and aeration, increases water-holding capacity, decreases erosion, moderates soil temperature, and adds beneficial organic matter.

- ***Supply Excess Mulch to Others***

Consider providing excess mulch to other landscapers, public agencies, or school and community gardens. Some public agencies apply mulch materials directly to street medians, road rights-of-way, and park paths and trails. Mulch is also applied on vacant lots, around tree and shrub plantings, and pathways on public properties.

- ***Use Curbside Collection Programs***

Many communities have residential curbside pickup services for green waste. Residents may have yard waste carts that their recycling service has provided for green waste collection. Waste haulers usually collect this material for making compost. Landscapers should maximize the use of green waste carts provided to residents by their recycling services. They are free.

- ***Support Home Composting***

Many residents now practice home composting as a way to support the waste reduction efforts of their communities. In turn, landscapers should help their customers recycle. With customers' permission, place as much of the yard trimming materials as possible in their compost bin or pile.

Some residential customers may be willing to pay an outside contractor to maintain their compost pile. Ask customers if they would like you to aerate ("turn") and water the pile. This service can become an additional source of revenue for your business.

If there is no curbside pickup in areas where you do business, suggest to clients that they compost their own yard waste. Help clients get started by providing an on-site composting service.

## **The Final Option: Recycle Off Site**

Recycling green waste materials off site for use as mulch or compost feedstock is the last step. This is a cost and resource-efficient alternative to landfill disposal.

- ***Use Alternative Disposal Facilities***

Large volumes of organic waste material can go to alternative disposal facilities, transfer stations, or landfills. These materials are accepted, for a small fee, to be composted, processed into soil amendments, or chipped into mulch for landscape use or landfill cover.

- ***Locating Alternative Disposal Facilities***

These facilities are listed in the Yellow Pages under "Recycling," "Garbage," or "Waste Disposal." They are conveniently located and usually cheaper than landfill disposal. In some areas there are topsoil manufacturers, soil blenders, or green waste processors that will accept your yard trimmings and supply you with finished compost or mulch on the same trip. A perfect example of closing the loop!

- ***Provide Clean Materials***

Just remember that most of these facilities want "clean green" materials that have no contaminants like bottles, cans, plastic bags, or other general rubbish. Green waste processors or recyclers may be willing to enter into a favorable long-term arrangement, if you can supply a steady flow of clean green feedstock.

- ***Check Out Waste Haulers***

Any clean green materials that are picked up on site by commercial waste haulers should also be delivered to alternate disposal facilities for recycling. Check out the services and contract language before entering into an agreement to ensure that your green materials will be recycled.

## **Resources Available from the CIWMB**

For information on the above practices, a compost and mulch source list, a list of publications available for downloading or online ordering, and composting regulations, see the Board's Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Organics/Landscaping/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Organics/Landscaping/). For information on wood and green materials recyclers, processors, and receivers, see [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/ConDemo/Recyclers/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/ConDemo/Recyclers/).