



MOUNT PROSPECT SUSTAINABILITY news

SPRING 2025

PLASTIC AND OUR ENVIRONMENT

Plastics are used every day in a wide range of ways. The most common items that come to mind when talking about plastics include items such as plastic utensils, carryout containers, plastic bags, and other smaller single use items. But plastics are used for a lot more things! The hard rough white outside of a golf ball is made of plastic, traffic cones are made of plastic, a large portion of phone components are made of plastics, contact lenses are made with plastic, and the vast majority of other daily items use plastics!

The EPA divides plastics into three main categories for solid waste purpose:

- 1. Containers and Packages:** products such as plastic bags, containers, and wrapping material. These may be used to wrap or contain consumer goods.
- 2. Nondurable Goods:** products with a use lifespan of less than three years, such as plastic plates, cups, trash

bags, disposable diapers, and clothing.

- 3. Durable goods:** Durable goods consist of products that remain in use for longer than three years such as appliances, furniture, carpet, and consumer electronics.

All three types of plastic have different methods for recycling. Some of the items can be discarded at home, while others have special recycling conditions that may require unique disposal methods. To help sort out how to dispose of plastics and other waste items, use the Village of Mount Prospects “Recycling Coach” on the Village’s website. You can access Recycling Coach by clicking the link [HERE](#).

What is Recycle Coach? Don’t confuse this with the Chicago Bears strategy of “Cycling Through Coaches”. Recycle Coach is an online tool and an app that allows you to search any disposable item and find out if it can be recycled, and how it can be recycled if possible.

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Making Plastic

Nearly all plastics are made through the direct use of oil, gas, and coal. This first stage in the creation of plastics can be very harmful to the area where it is collected. Drilling done on land can have negative impacts on ecosystems, and off shore drilling can impact marina ecosystems. Both of these options can have hazardous impacts to the larger environment through oil spills and gas leaks. Spills and leaks can infiltrate the water system and have dire indirect consequences.

Raw materials then need to be physically converted into a useable state after collection. Significant amounts of energy is used to convert the raw materials into longer chains of molecules which are mixed with additional chemicals to create the wide range of plastics we use today. Additional chemicals very dramatically in their chemical composition and their environmental impacts.

“**PLASTIC POLLUTION IS PERSISTENT AND MAY TAKE BETWEEN 100 TO 1,000 YEARS OR MORE TO DECOMPOSE - US EPA**”

What Happens to Plastic?

What happens to plastics, specifically single use plastics, after they are used? Unlike glass and metal which are high value recyclables, single use plastic products are low value recycling items that can often get missed in the recycling process or rejected by recycling facilities.

Being missed in the recycling process results in single use plastics being treated as standard refuse and sent to landfills. These items sit out in the sun and heat, constantly breaking down into smaller, and smaller, and smaller pieces of plastics. No matter how small the plastics get they will never truly decompose.

This is where the term “Micro Plastics” comes from. Plastics eventually become less than 5 millimeters in size. So where does this plastic end up? Inside the human body, in water, and inside wildlife. Wildlife sees the quickest repercussions from microplastics and can lead to severe damage to animal’s health and well being. Humans also experience repercussions from microplastics, this includes hormone abnormalities, infertility, and even cancer.

Information in this section came from the UCONN Extension, click [here](#) to access the full article.

PLASTICS

What is “Wish Cycling”

“Wish Cycling” is a by product of well intentioned actions with unexpected side effects. This happens when you have an item that you really hope is recyclable or you think its recyclable, you throw it in the recycling bin, but its actual normal garbage. No worries, this is a common mistake that is easy to fix!

The best way to combat wish cycling is knowledge. Please click the link [HERE](#) to access Republic’s (The Village’s refuse and recycling hauler) quick reference guide on recycling and check out a few common examples below!

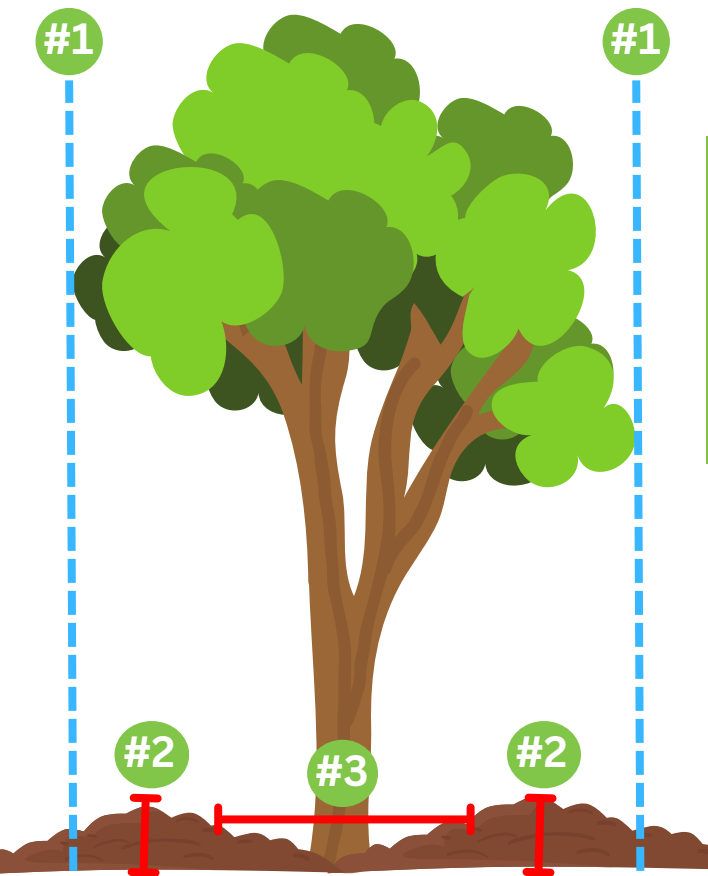
Another way to avoid wish cycling is through the phrase “When in doubt, throw it out”. This may seem counter productive when you are trying to make a difference and prevent items from going to the land fill. To much contamination of non recyclable items in a recycling bin can result in the entire load being discarded as standard refuse.

Remember to not bag your recycling items, have them be loose in your bin! Plastic bags cannot be disposed of as part of normal curb side recycling services. Plastic bags require special collections that can often be found at retail stores.



YARD CARE

The Anatomy of Tree Mulching!



#1 Drip Lines: The blue dashed lines featured in the infographic to the left are called “drip lines”. Drip lines signify the edge of the root structure and the furthest out you will need to mulch. Use the edge of the tree’s canopy to determine the drip line!

#2 Mulch Mounds: When placing mulch around the side of your tree, remember that a little goes a long way! The highest point should be no higher than two to four inches. Too much mulch will prevent water, air, and nutrients from reaching the roots below.

#3 Mulch Trunk Barrier : A common term that defines a poorly mulched tree is “mulch volcano”. Leave a gap of several inches between any portion of the trunk and the surrounding mulch. Failure to leave a barrier can capture moisture and lead to softened bark and inevitable bark rot.

Lawn Care - Don't Mow Too Low!

One very common mistake is mowing lawns too short. For most lawns, a mowing height between 2½ to 3 inches is suggested. Lawns mowed at higher heights tend to have deeper roots, less weed problems, and look much better. Mowing too close invites problems such as opportunities for weed growth.

Many resources online recommend varying height depending on weather and growing conditions. For most home lawns, the easiest strategy is to set your mowing height and leave it at that.

Source: [Illinois Extension](#)

Did You Know? Deep grass roots can help with drought resistance.

The One-Third Rule

Easier said than done, but lawns should be mowed according to the rate of grass growth. Remember not to cut more than one-third of the grass leaf in a single cutting. Mowing as the lawn needs it is essential. In the spring, this will likely mean more than once a week. It is never advisable to mow when the grass is wet.

To Bag or Not To Bag

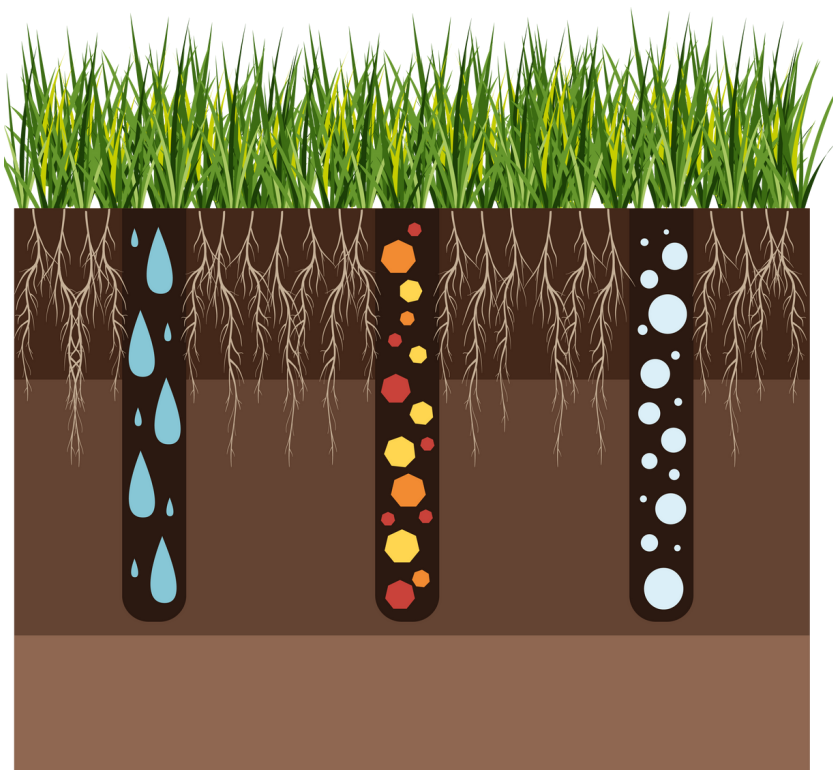
As long as the lawn is mowed on an as needed basis and the one-third rule is followed, clippings will readily filter back down into the lawn, and need not be collected. The clippings will decompose (they contain 75 - 80% water) and will not cause excessive thatch accumulation. Clippings also recycle nutrients, especially nitrogen, so less fertilizer is needed.

Mulching mowers create even finer clippings, recycling the nutrients more often as the smaller clippings decay faster. Mulching mowers do not perform at peak efficiency if the lawn is too tall or if the lawn is wet. Mulching mowers can be purchased or conventional side-discharged mowers can be converted to a mulching mower.

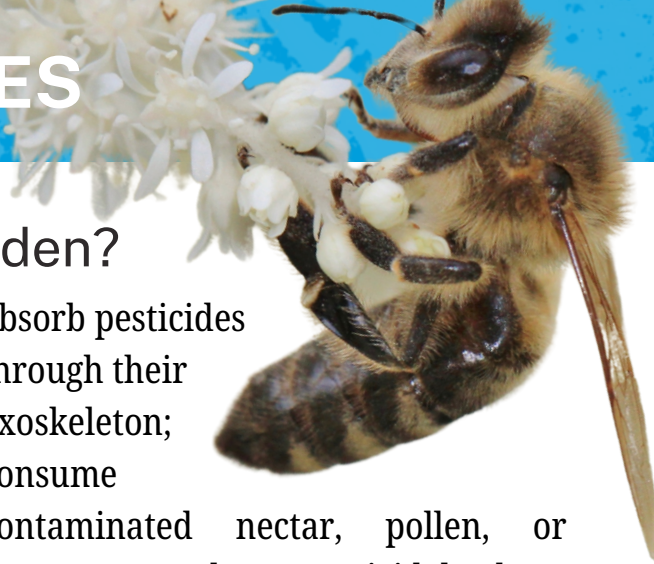
Lawn and Soil Aeration

The aeration process for lawns and the top most layer of soil is a simple and effective method to help your lawn get better access of oxygen, have water to reach roots, and allow seeds, lime, and fertilizer to enter into the soil.

Aeration uses an machine to pull small “plugs” of soil out of the ground and create small cavities for resources to reach deep soil and plant roots. Aeration can be done in summer or fall depending on your type of lawn. Make sure your soil is damp, but not overly damp! Lawns should be aerated every one to two years.



PESTICIDES & HERBICIDES



Aren't Pesticides Good for My Garden?

Yes and no to that question. Yes, pesticides can prevent harmful insects and pests from destroying your garden. But they can also have extreme side effects that are incredibly dangerous to your garden and the larger eco system!

Pesticides attack all bugs, insects, and pests without discerning between which are good, and which are bad. Pesticides are increasingly recognized as a factor in the decline of bees and other beneficial insects. Bees can be poisoned when they

absorb pesticides through their exoskeleton; consume contaminated nectar, pollen, or water; or when pesticidal dusts become trapped in their pollen-collecting hairs. These non-target poisonings may occur immediately in the field when pesticides are applied, but harm also can occur days and even months after an application when toxic residues persist.

The text is extracted, with permission, from Organic Pesticides: Minimizing Risks to Bees and Other Agriculturally Beneficial Insects, published by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

What About Herbicides?

Very similar to pesticides, herbicides can have unintended consequences on your garden and lead to a whole host of problems!

Herbicides attempt to target weeds and other unwanted plants in your garden. Unwanted plant invaders might be the target, but some times other plants can get in the way. One plant that very often becomes a casualty is “milkweed”. Milkweed is often viewed as a weed, but it plays an interictal role in the life cycle of pollinator and bees. Milkweed serves as a



food source for pollinators, especially for monarch butterflies.

Herbicides have also been known to “drift” and move from their targeted area on to other untargeted areas. Drifting can be exacerbated by hard surfaces like roads and sidewalks.

Cook County Update: Renewable Energy Subsidy Program

Cook County announced the reopening for applications to participate in the Cook County Sun and Save program, an initiative launched in September 2023 by the County's Department of Environment and Sustainability (DES). Cook County partnered with the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center (SEDAC), which is a collaborative effort between the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and 360 Energy Group, to establish this program.

To date, nearly 30 residential solar photovoltaic (PV) systems installations have been completed. With a goal of installing solar on 120 homes, this program makes solar installations more accessible for eligible Cook County residents. Installing solar helps reduce carbon emissions, utility bills and barriers to clean energy for residents.

Click [here](#) to read the full Cook County press release and apply

Herbicide Alternatives

Careful Watering - One of the easiest ways to avoid the need for herbicides is by carefully watering your garden. Doing this will help to assure the correct plants get water in your garden and help them compete against unwanted plants.

Hand Weeding - It might not be the most glamorous option, but hand weeding is an effective to remove the unwanted plants and keep the wanted plants.

Mulch - One of the easiest and most common ways to prevent weeds from growing is laying down mulch. Mulch acts as a means of preventing seed in weeds from germinating and also stops or slows down any growth if the seeds do begin the germination process. Shredded bark from cypress, pine, and cedar, wood chips, cocoa hulls, recycled wood, and mushroom compost are fantastic mulch options!

