

Universal Recycling

Leaf, Yard, and Clean Wood Debris Guide

This guide outlines requirements and recommendations for the collection and management of leaf, yard, and clean wood debris in accordance with Vermont laws, including Universal Recycling (Act 148 of 2012), Architectural Waste Recycling (Act 175 of 2014), and Burning wood within municipality (Act 244 of 1971; 10 V.S.A. § 565), as well as the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) Solid Waste Program rules and Air Pollution Control Regulations.

Facilities and Haulers: Options for Managing Leaf, Yard and Clean Wood Debris							
Material	Management options						
	Reuse/ Recycle	Agricultural & Landscaping (mulch, animal bedding)	Compost	Energy Recovery (heat, power)	Categorical Disposal/ Burial	Open Burning	Landfill (residential trash; alternative daily cover)
Leaf and Yard Debris:							
Leaves, grass clippings	n/a	Yes	Yes	n/a	NO ¹	NO	NO
Brush <1" thick				Not preferred			
Clean Wood Debris:							
Limbs & brush ≥1" thick	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not preferred ¹	Not preferred ¹	NO
Stumps & roots				n/a			
Clean lumber (untreated)	Yes ²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not preferred ²	Not preferred ²	

¹ ANR strongly recommends that clean wood debris be reused, repurposed, or recycled, for uses such as: construction (for dimensional lumber); chip for new particle board; mulch; compost feedstock; firewood; and biomass energy. If all reasonable efforts have been made to find end markets for recycling, reuse, and repurposing and no other options exist, clean wood may be buried at categorical disposal facilities (but not landfills). **Clean wood and brush that are kept separate from leaf and grass piles may be burned at Act 244 municipal burn sites (typically transfer stations) confirmed by the Vermont Air Quality & Climate Division. Do not burn leaf and grass piles.** For information on air quality regulations, contact Dave Shepard at 802-272-4088 or dave.shepard@vermont.gov.

² The Architectural Waste Recycling Act (Act 175) requires recycling of architectural waste materials from commercial C&D projects generating more than 40 cubic yards of architectural waste (drywall, metal, asphalt shingles, clean wood, plywood, and OSB) if an appropriate recycling facility is located within 20 miles of the project.

Leaf, yard, and clean wood debris are valuable resources. After **July 1, 2016**, they **cannot be disposed of in trash or landfills**. The ANR Solid Waste Program, in conjunction with Vermont Solid Waste Management Entities, seeks to ensure that all residents and businesses have easy and convenient options for the beneficial use of these materials, such as use in farming, landscaping, composting, and energy recovery. Protecting the environment, public health, and prevention of nuisance conditions are additional goals for the successful management of these materials.

DEFINITIONS

Leaf and yard debris (“leaf and yard residual”): source-separated, compostable, untreated vegetative matter, including but not limited to grass clippings, leaves, kraft paper bags, and brush <1 inch in diameter, that are free from non-compostable materials. Does not include materials such as pre- and post-consumer food residuals, food processing residuals, or soiled paper.

Clean wood (“wood waste”): trees, untreated and unpainted wood including dimensional lumber, and other natural woody debris, including tree stumps, brush and limbs ≥ 1 inch in diameter, root mats, and logs.

Open burning: the burning of any type of combustible material in the open, where the products of combustion are emitted directly into the *ambient air* space without passing through a stack, chimney, or other enclosure. Includes ignition, permitting or causing ignition, and allowing or maintaining burning.

HOW AND WHERE *SHOULD* THESE MATERIALS BE MANAGED?

There are multiple acceptable ways to handle leaf and yard debris and clean wood debris.

Manage at home: Encourage customers to consider using these materials at home, as in small construction projects, farming, gardening, composting, or home heating. Find more information for residents at www.vtrecycles.com.

Drop-off at transfer station/other facility: Transfer stations and bag-drop or “fast trash” haulers that accept trash *must* separately accept leaf and yard debris between at minimum April 1 through December 15. This means at least a dumpster, a few containers (e.g., modified rolling carts), or a managed pile approved in the facility’s management plan. Transfer stations and bag-drops must deliver these materials to a location where they will be managed according to the priority uses established in the Universal Recycling Law’s organics recovery hierarchy, including agricultural use, composting, or energy recovery. Customers may be charged for this service. Provided that a minimum level of leaf and yard debris collection service is offered, transfer stations and bag-drops may encourage customers to use other sites for these materials, such as composting facilities, stump dumps, or farms. Clean wood is *not* required to be collected by transfer stations or bag-drops. Recycling centers that do not collect trash are not required to offer collection of leaf and yard debris.

Transfer station managers should contact the ANR Solid Waste Certification Section to amend facility management plans to include collection and management of leaf and yard debris and any other new materials. Find information at the DEC facilities page: <http://dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/solid-waste-facilities>.

Collection by commercial hauler: Commercial haulers are not required to offer collection leaf and yard debris.

Commercial composter: Some commercial composters accept leaf and yard debris, especially material that is chipped. Find a facility using the Vermont [Materials Management Map](#).

Farm: Some farms accept leaf and yard debris. Contact the farmer *before* bringing any material to their farm.

Energy generation at power plant: Clean wood (but *not* leaf and yard debris) may be burned at power plants such as the McNeil Power Plant in Burlington.

Heating: Clean wood has long been used for heating buildings, and is still prevalent today. Get the most heat and minimize particulate and toxic emissions by burning only clean, dry, well-seasoned wood, in a stove or boiler that provides good ventilation and is EPA-certified. Do *not* burn wood that is painted, stained, or treated in any way. Do *not* burn engineered wood such as particle board or glulam. See the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Air Quality & Climate Division for more information about wood stoves.

Burial at stump & inert waste dump/categorical disposal sites: When stumps and root masses need to be disposed of off-site, they may be buried with inert material such as concrete at facilities currently certified by ANR to accept stumps, root masses, or larger brush. If all efforts to reuse, repurpose, and recycle clean wood or brush fail, and no other options exist, they may also be buried. Leaf and yard debris collected at solid waste facilities may *not* be buried. Facilities must adhere to the conditions of their certification. Facilities may charge to provide this service. Burial is *not* a preferred management strategy.

Variance: Facilities may petition ANR for a variance from the requirement to collect leaf and yard debris, *provided that* they demonstrate the availability of convenient alternative services with sufficient capacity to meet local needs. No variance shall be granted except after public notice, an opportunity for a public meeting, and due consideration by ANR of the interests of all stakeholders.

Disposal as a Last Resort: If composters will not accept weeds, crops residues, or any other plant materials because they are invasive, diseased, or may contain hazardous or non-compostable substances, then they may be disposed in the trash and landfills as a last resort.



Tips for passive management of leaf & yard debris at facilities

- Piling leaf and yard debris to passively decompose into compost is acceptable, provided it is part of the facility's approved management plan.
- **What:** Passive management works best for smaller-diameter materials, such as leaves, small brush, and grass clippings.
- **Where:** Select a large area out of the way of heavy use areas, where material will get rain. A shady area out of the direct summer sun works best.
- **How:** Keep what you want to manage passively separate from materials for reuse, like lumber
- Pile material starting at the back.
- Start with a layer of small brush or wood chips, then alternate layers of higher nitrogen content materials, like fresh grass and leaves, with higher carbon materials, like small brush.
- Decomposition can take 1-2 years, but can be accelerated if the pile is turned occasionally
- Passive piles do not get hot enough to destroy weed seeds.
- Once the material looks like dark, rich, soil, allow the compost to cure in a separate pile for about 6 months before use in planting. For a richer compost, loosely cover the curing pile.

Tips for separating leaf & yard debris from other materials at facilities

- Decide how different material types will be managed at the site *before* starting to accept it.
- Create clear boundaries between where different materials are to be placed.
- Install clear signs.
- Distribute information to facility users *before* they arrive describing how materials should be separated.
- Talk to every vehicle at the entrance to describe the proper placement of materials.
- Monitor drop-off locations to ensure correct placement of materials.
- Take prompt corrective action when material is misplaced.

Sites accepting leaf, yard, or clean wood debris may require permits from the ANR Solid Waste Program to comply with solid waste rules. Contact the Solid Waste Certification Section for information at (802)